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Christiane Millet and Gabriele Osburg  
in *November Moon* (Alexandra von  
Grote 1985) Picture courtesy BFI  
Stills

# Eisenstein, rhetoric and imaginicity: towards a revolutionary *memoria*

MARTIN LEFEBVRE

*The mnemonic manner of a man is, to a great extent, the key to  
the particular nature of his mental activity*  
Sergei Eisenstein<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sergei Eisenstein *Nonindifferent Nature* trans Herbert Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987) p 337

<sup>2</sup> I am not the first commentator to register surprise at Eisenstein's interest for things mystical or occult within the Soviet context although this is certainly not the most documented aspect of his work. One exception is Håkan Lovgren's article 'Sergei Eisenstein's Gnostic circle' which discusses Eisenstein's Rosicrucian initiation of 1920 and some of the hermetic themes of his work and theorizing. In Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (ed.) *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1997) pp 273–97

<sup>3</sup> Eisenstein *Nonindifferent Nature* p 171

This paper originates in what, at first sight, may seem like a strange meeting of minds. The latter takes place towards the end of the first half of *Nonindifferent Nature*, as Sergei Eisenstein, the fervent Bolshevik, calls upon the Catholic mysticism of Ignatius of Loyola to explain his ideas about pathos and ecstasy.<sup>2</sup> 'From the very bowels of the mysterious Manresa', writes Eisenstein, '– this cradle of the most refined methods of ecstatic psychotechnics – and from the hand of the very creator of this most perfect method of achieving ecstasy, from the hand of Saint Ignatius Loyola, we have a most interesting psychological observation on the most refined and delicate phase of the ecstatic state – on that very phase we are particularly interested in here.'<sup>3</sup>

How are we to understand this coming together of Eisenstein and Loyola? Are there parallels between the author of *Battleship Potemkin* and that of the *Spiritual Exercises*?

What interests me in this unusual pairing concerns rhetoric, as well as Eisenstein's doctrine of imaginicity which he developed during the 1930s, and for which the idea of ecstasy – so important for the project of *Nonindifferent Nature* – constitutes in many ways the ultimate feature.

Of course, there is little originality in highlighting the relevance of rhetoric with regards to Eisenstein's *oeuvre*. In fact, most would

readily concede that both practical and theoretical works by Eisenstein are indeed rhetorical in that they constantly aim at convincing, influencing, or even, in the case of his films, moulding the spectator. Consequently, a great number of commentators have already examined how Eisenstein's *cinéma engagé* relies on rhetorical processes and filmic tropes and figures in response to demands for ideological efficacy.<sup>4</sup> Yet, notwithstanding the importance of such studies, it may be advisable to broaden the scope of our rhetorical investigations of Eisenstein's work beyond that of tropes and figures. This, as I will try to show, is what is suggested to me by Eisenstein's reference to Loyola.

4 See Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, 'Fonction de la métaphore dans *Octobre* d'Eisenstein', *Littérature*, no. 11 (1973); Christian Metz, *Le Signifiant imaginaire* (Paris: UGE, 1977); David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: WI University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Jacques Gerstenkorn, *La Métaphore au cinéma* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1995).

### Ancient rhetoric: memory and imagination

It is well known that rhetoric today is either confined to the study of argumentation (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca) or to that of tropes and figures (le Groupe  $\mu$ ). So numerous have been the changes that have brought about this 'restricted rhetoric' that it would prove impossible for me to offer here a historical account without unduly simplifying it. Yet, were one even superficially to examine the history of this art, it would be difficult not to notice that today's restricted rhetoric has relinquished certain parts that made up ancient rhetoric, most notably *memoria* and *actio*. Ancient rhetoric consisted in five parts, out of which only three have survived: *inventio*, *dispositio* and *elocutio*, while interest for the other two diminished.

Among the many reasons for the waning of interest in *memoria* and *actio*, there is the obvious one according to which rhetoric came to concern itself almost exclusively with issues of discourse and discourse production, issues for which *memoria* and *actio* appeared non-essential. But this has not always been the case. Hence, before commenting directly on Eisenstein, I would like briefly to examine this forgotten aspect of rhetoric which is memory. Only then will it become possible to establish a parallel between the ecstatic projects of both Eisenstein and Loyola.

To begin with, it is important to mention that even before its integration into rhetoric as one of its constitutive parts by Latin rhetoricians, memory was already a central aspect of rhetorical thought. This was the case in ancient Greece and in particular in the works of Plato and Aristotle, in spite of the major differences one finds in their views on memory.

The harshness of Plato's comments towards those who use oratory in a purely technical or virtuoso manner in order to persuade their audience of one thing or another indiscriminately is well known. There is, writes Plato, 'no "soothfast" art of speech, nor assuredly will there ever be one, without a grasp of truth'.<sup>5</sup> For Plato, then, a true rhetoric, a true art of discourse, must always base its attempts to

5 Plato *Phaedrus* trans. R. Hackford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), § 260e.

persuade on knowledge. This implies that rhetoric be seen as an art of saying the truth or as a tool for the discovery of the truth. To arrive at such ends, rhetoric must engage memory, or reminiscence, which, as always for Plato, ensures the discovery of the truth and the acquisition of knowledge. In this sense, the dialogue of *Phaedrus* returns to the view initially expounded in *Meno* according to which the acquisition of the truth and the search for knowledge presuppose the soul's ability to recall the truths it has previously seen but since forgotten. It has to be understood that memory, in this case, does not correspond to our everyday sense recollections since these are conjectural and therefore do not concern the truth. Rather, memory here concerns the reminiscence of transcendent Forms or Ideas glimpsed by the soul before our coming into the world. Memory thus constitutes our only access to knowledge. For Plato, in short, memory is what underlies the whole edifice of rhetoric in its ideal and metaphysical quest for the truth.<sup>6</sup>

For Aristotle, memory also gives access to knowledge. Inspired in part by Plato's critique of rhetoric, Aristotle seeks nonetheless to rehabilitate the art, which he defines as a counterpart of dialectics. Rhetoric is useful, he claims, because it enables one to make use of what may simply appear as a truth – that is, opinion, common sense, or *doxa* – in order to persuade men of what is indeed real or truthful; whereas dialectics is limited to more scholarly or philosophical practice. The function of rhetoric, writes Aristotle, 'is not simply to succeed in persuading, but rather to discover the means of coming as near such success as the circumstances of each particular case allow'.<sup>7</sup> And although Aristotle refutes Plato's theory of reminiscence in favour of what one could say today is a more 'psychological' model for memory, the latter still occupies a most important place in his theory of knowledge. The reason is that, for Aristotle, memory belongs to that part of the soul which mediates between sensation and knowledge, the same part to which belongs the imagination and where are housed the internal images that are so important for his theory of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Aristotle's treatise on memory, the *De Memoria et Reminiscencia*, refers directly to the terms put forth in *De Anima* – of which it is an appendix – where it is claimed that thinking requires images. Aristotle also distinguishes clearly between natural memory and reminiscence, or recollection. While the former relies on internal (or mental) and temporalized images – whether or not they have their source in sense perception – the latter is the actual act of recalling something from the past, and for which Aristotle suggests the use of mnemotechnic strategies (association of ideas or images, order, and so on) not unlike the ones used by those who practise the techniques of artificial memory.<sup>9</sup>

As for the Latin tradition, Frances Yates, in her celebrated essay on the art of memory, has shown how the works of Cicero, that of

6 As Frances Yates explains with regards to Plato's *Phaedrus*: 'Memory is not just a "section" of this treatise – as one part of the art of rhetoric, memory in the Platonic sense is the groundwork of the whole'. Frances Yates *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: IL, University of Chicago Press, 1966) p. 37.

7 Aristotle *Rhetorica*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts in W.D. Ross (ed.), *The Works of Aristotle* Volume 11, Book I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946) § 1355b.

8 Aristotle *De Memoria et Reminiscencia*, trans. J.I. Beare and G.R.T. Ross in W.D. Ross (ed.), *Parva Naturalia, The Works of Aristotle* Volume 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931). See especially § 450a: 'Accordingly if asked of which among the parts of the soul memory is a function we reply manifestly of that part to which presentation [imagination] appertains'.

9 The distinction Aristotle makes is between memory as the perception of things past and reminiscence as the process of wilfully recalling or recovering those perceptions. As Frances Yates notes: 'Recollection is the recovery of knowledge or sensation which one had before. It is a deliberate effort to find one's way among the contents of memory hunting among its contents for what one is trying to recollect'. Yates *The Art of Memory* pp. 33–4.

the anonymous author of the *Ad Herennium*, and of *Quintilian*, offer memory a new role as it now becomes integrated within the five parts of rhetoric. The Latins are more interested by artificial than natural memory, that is, they are more interested in the art of memorizing data, or mnemonics. The orator must memorize his speech before delivering it and so must develop the art of memory. Paradoxically, however, such reliance on artificial memory announces the end of *memoria* as an aspect of rhetoric: confined to mnemotechnic, it will become useless for rhetoric and all but disappears with the coming of writing and the arrival of printing many centuries later. Yet, as Yates has shown, the art of memory tradition – which still connects memory with imagination – will enjoy a most fantastic upsurge during the Renaissance when it amalgamates with hermetic and neo-Platonic trends

As described by various authors – including most importantly Cicero and the author of the *Ad Herennium* – the art of memory necessitates the use of places and images. The images are internal and are often referred to as *imagines agentes*, or moving images. They are produced by the orator's imagination as it comes into contact with what it is that he seeks to memorize, and are then laid onto real or imaginary places – or *loci memoriae* – within his mind. The images serve as signs and help with remembering. As for the places, they are analogous to memory itself and guide the orator on the path towards extracting the desired signs from his memory. Using a well-known image from Plato's *Theaetetus*, Yates suggests we conceive of memory places as wax tablets onto which the orator engraves the images of words or things that he wishes to memorize. The *Ad Herennium* recommends the use of strong, moving images that will not be easily erased from memory.

By integrating memory into rhetoric as one of its constitutive parts, the Latin tradition attempted to incorporate it within a system capable of describing oratory in logical and chronological fashion, leading from *inventio* to *actio*. The orator must first find his arguments (*inventio*), order the different elements (*dispositio*), and determine the level of language or style of his speech (*elocutio*). He must then set within his mind the results of these processes (*memoria*) and, when the time has come, deliver his speech through disciplined use of gesture and voice (*actio* and *pronunciatio*). In this causal chain, it appears clearly that memory has now lost most of its claim on the production of discourse. In fact, memory's only remaining link with *inventio* is developed through argumentative *topoi* – a term borrowed from Aristotle's *Topica* – which, Cicero explains, have to be housed within the orator's memory. But while the notion of *topos*, as it is used by Latin rhetoricians, is clearly indebted to the art of memory<sup>10</sup> – thus maintaining a fundamental connection between memory and the production of discourse – it has the unfortunate disadvantage of limiting memory's role to that of a

<sup>10</sup> This is also the case for Aristotle. See W.A. De Pater, 'La fonction du lieu et de l'instrument dans *Les Topiques*' in G.E.L. Owen (ed.) *Aristotle on Dialectic: The Topics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 164–88.



vast storehouse. In fact, one has to wait until the Renaissance and its revival of rhetoric – to which belongs the ‘ecstatic psychotechnic’ of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* and to which Eisenstein’s doctrine of imaginicity is indebted in important ways – to witness once again the unrestricted semiotic potential of memory and its coming together with imagination

### **The Renaissance, Loyola and Eisenstein**

It is well known that Eisenstein was fascinated by the Renaissance. Both his writings and the unfinished *Ivan the Terrible* trilogy are eloquent testimony to this fascination. But the Renaissance is important here in that it signals a return to ancient rhetoric and a rediscovery of *memoria*. This is the age of hermetic neo-Platonism, an era described by Foucault in *The Order of Things* as relying on an *épistémè* of similitude. Among the important figures of the period are Marcilio Ficino (1433–99), Pico della Mirandola (1463–94), Giulio Camillo (1480–1544), Paracelsus (1493–1541), Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), Robert Fludd (1574–1637), Jacob Bohme (1575–1624), and the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1602–80).

In this environment, memory acquires a new status and comes to occupy centre stage in the attempts made by hermetic thinkers to develop a unified knowledge about the universe. Memory thus appears as much more than a simple warehouse where data is passively registered and stored. Rather, it is now regarded as a central and active participant in the development and organization of knowledge whose work is based on analogy and similitude or, to put it differently, based on the imagination and the images (analogues or similes) it produces. The arts of memory of the Renaissance are not, therefore, practical tools for memorizing speeches, they are powerful means for understanding the world and for semiotically constructing it through ‘imagistic’ or ‘imaginistic’ representations. This is the case, for example, with the wondrous theatres of Giulio Camillo or Robert Fludd which, while based on hermetic beliefs regarding the union of microcosm and macrocosm, offer themselves as ways of seeing and knowing the world. Such memory schemes help us not only to conceive of memory as the faculty of information storage and retrieval but, more importantly, to see it as the power of making information accessible, of regulating it and organizing it according to the principles set forth by ancient rhetoric and its system of memory places. In short, memory, in what is by far the most important feature of its rediscovery during the Renaissance, is now seen as giving access to a knowledge and an imaginary through the very process of creating them. To put it in more modern terms, we can say that memory now clearly appears as a semiotic matrix, as the basis for human sign activity – conceived

as a mise-en-signé or semiotization of the world – and thus as the foundation for rhetorical practice and all forms of discourse production.<sup>11</sup>

Memory gives access to knowledge by way of the imagination and its images, it requires a work of imagination. In the context of rhetoric, this may be explained by drawing on the Aristotelian notion of *topos*, whose contents can be seen as a way of rationalizing the production of certain internal or mental images. Although Latin rhetoricians worked at reifying these images until they eventually turned into fully-fledged stereotypes, they nonetheless saw their source as laying in what they referred to as *inventio*, that is, the art of finding ideas and arguments. This is the part of rhetoric that relies on the workings of the imagination, understood as the power of image-making. The use, in this particular context, of the term *topoi* to designate the products of the imagination – a term whose origins, as previously mentioned, definitely associate it to memory – clearly illustrates the union of *memoria* and *inventio*, of memory and imagination, as constituting the core of both rhetoric and rhetorical (or discursive) practice. Thus, if *memoria*, as Gilles Thérien has noted, constitutes the foundation of all forms of discourse, it only becomes active when solicited and shaped by *inventio* or, in other words, when it is enriched by the imagination.<sup>12</sup> And nowhere has the influence of imagination on memory been more striking than in the hermetic arts of memory developed during the Renaissance. Here, imagination presides over the emergence of magical or talismanic images whose function it is to ensure the union of different cosmic spheres within memory while offering those who possess and cultivate such *memoria* access to the great book of the universe.

The Renaissance revival of ancient rhetoric and of its *memoria* through the emergence of the hermetic arts of memory, constitutes an important aspect of the general historical and intellectual context from which to examine Loyola's mysticism and his *Spiritual Exercises* – especially if we wish to understand the parallels that exist between Loyola and Eisenstein. Loyola's *Exercises*, which start by asking of the exercitant that he compose a place in order to lay on it a view of the imagination,<sup>13</sup> are not simply a form of ascetic practice. They also constitute a mnemonic device of sorts and seek to elaborate a *memoria* – conceived as a semiotic matrix – which forms the core of Jesuit rhetoric and preaching.<sup>14</sup>

Memory is constantly invoked throughout the *Exercises*. As Pierre-Antoine Fabre recently put it 'It nourishes all representations, it always inhabits the composed places, it bails out the senses – it invades the theatre of the imagination . . . and turns contemplation into a web of secret memory'.<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly a number of Renaissance Jesuits became masters in the art of memory. This was the case with the Italian Matteo Ricci who, during his mission to

11 This gives full meaning to a comment made recently by Joëlle Gardes-Tamine, according to whom 'toute la rhétorique est une vaste mémoire – mémoire de tout ce dont l'orateur a besoin avant même d'avoir à se remémorer son discours fini'. *La Rhétorique* (Paris: Armand Colin 1996) p. 73.

12 Gilles Thérien, *Memoria* as a place of fabrication of the new world in Germaine Warkentin (ed.), *De-centring the Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).

13 See statement 47 of the *Spiritual Exercises* where it is written 'The first prelude is a composition of place: seeing the spot. Here it is to be observed that in contemplation or meditation on visible matters such as the contemplation of Christ our Lord, Who is visible, the composition will be to see with the eyes of the imagination the corporeal place where the thing I wish to contemplate is found. I say the corporeal place such as the Temple or the mountain, where Jesus Christ or our Lady is found according to what I desire to contemplate. In meditation on invisible things such as the present meditation on sins, the composition will be to see with the eyes of the imagination and to consider that my soul is imprisoned in this corruptible body, and my whole self in this vale of misery, as it were in exile among brute beasts. I say my whole self, that is, soul and body. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Text of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (London: Burns and Oates 1952).

14 See Thérien, *Memoria* as a place of fabrication.

15 Pierre-Antoine Fabre, *Ignace de Loyola: Le lieu de l'image* (Paris: Vrin, 1992), p. 89. Translation mine.

China, developed a most complex memory palace in his effort to convert Chinese mandarins to Christianity.<sup>16</sup>

As should be expected, the Jesuit memory which emerges from the *Spiritual Exercises* is accompanied by an 'imagistic' practice. In fact, the four-week-long spiritual journey of the *Exercises* is filled with images. They serve to purge the exercitant's memory and imagination of the impure images which inhabit his mind and soul and replace them with purified images associated mainly to certain biblical episodes and to the life of Christ, thus enabling the creation of a *memoria*<sup>17</sup> that will serve as a starting point for *electio* and *Imitatio Christi*. In this regard, the *Exercises* clearly refer to Loyola's own mystical experiences during his stay in Manresa. In the *Acta Patris Ignatii*, Loyola explains how the sight of an image of the Madonna and Child erased all the images previously set in his soul. And commenting on the important role played by images throughout the *Exercises*, Roland Barthes writes of Loyola that 'he attempts to situate the image (or interior "sight") in orthodoxy, as a new unit of the language he is constructing':<sup>18</sup> and that 'all the labour of the *Exercises* consists in providing images to one who is innately without them'.<sup>19</sup>

By their use of images, the *Exercises* seek to guide the imagination in its shaping of memory, they offer a Catholic *topos* which works at framing each exercitant's use of memory. Thus the *Exercises* enable the construction of a *memoria*, of an individual and collective imaginary. Bound to the catholic faith of the founding father of the Jesuit Order, this *memoria* serves as a base or matrix regulating diverse semiotic practices ranging from devout behaviour, to teaching in colleges, or to evangelical missions in remote parts of the world. By summoning the imagination, the *Exercises* provide the exercitant – and members of the Society of Jesus – with the means for constructing an interior image-based world representation on the basis of which, once it is integrated to memory, one can act.<sup>20</sup> Thus the *Exercises* adopt an iconophilic attitude which will impact on most Jesuit enterprises including, obviously, rhetoric. This is the case, for instance, with the famous *rhétorique des peintures* practised by French Jesuits during the seventeenth century, and for which Marc Fumaroli has noted a similar psychagogic strategy to that of the *Exercises*, projecting outward what, in the *Exercises*, constitutes a projection onto the mental screen of the exercitant.<sup>21</sup> This approach to rhetoric is also related to the many attempts made at developing a Jesuit iconography, whose primitive phase includes Nadal's famous *Evangelicae historiae imagines*.<sup>22</sup>

There seems good reason why Eisenstein would be interested in Loyola. There is no surprise in a filmmaker – what is more, a revolutionary filmmaker – showing interest in a project that recognizes the role images can play in the construction of a *memoria*, of a semiotic matrix. Of course, as one might expect,

16 Several architectural metaphors have been used to characterize memory places. The most important ones during the Renaissance were the palace and the theatre. The palace metaphor connotes the 'treasures' of memory and paves the way to the idea of the museum as literally a place of memory (many museums such as the Louvres were initially palaces); the theatre metaphor reinforces the idea of memory as representation. With regard to the theatre metaphor, Yates suggested that Shakespeare's Globe Theatre be seen as a Memory Theatre. As for Ricci's memory palace, see Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking, Elisabeth Sifton Books, 1984).

17 As Fabre explains: 'l'imagination [dans les *Exercices*] n'est pas seulement ce dont l'esprit se purge' – elle est aussi ce par quoi il se purge. [Imagination [in the *Exercises*] is not only that which the spirit purges itself from; it also that by which it purges itself]. Fabre, *Ignace de Loyola* p. 32. Translation mine.

18 Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fournier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976) p. 65.

19 Ibid. p. 50.

20 See Thérien, 'Memoria as a place of fabrication'.

21 See Marc Fumaroli, *L'Âge de l'éloquence* (Genève: Droz, 1980) especially pp. 673–85.

22 See Fabre, *Ignace de Loyola* as well as his article 'Les Exercices spirituels sont-ils illustrables?' in *Les jésuites à l'âge baroque 1540–1640 sous la direction de Luce Giard et Louis de Vaucelles* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1996) pp. 197–209.

Eisenstein is initially critical towards Loyola and what he perceives to be a religious recuperation of an ecstatic (or mystical) experience. Yet, the principle itself of an ecstatic experience based on what Eisenstein calls a global or generalized image – a compositional principle he finds even in Stanislavsky's Method – will fascinate him to the point where he will go so far as to undergo one of the *Exercises*<sup>23</sup> before moulding his own theory of ecstasy according to Loyola's psychagogic.

In what follows, using the notion of *memoria* as a centrepiece, I will attempt to unravel the ties that exist in Eisenstein's work between, on the one hand, his theories of imaginicity, pathos, ecstasy and organicity and, on the other, his interest for the 'psychotechnics' of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. My hope is that, in the end, this will shed new light onto Eisenstein's own rhetorical theory and practice

### Imaginicity and Spiritual Exercises

In order to grasp properly the pertinence of the connections that exist between the modern filmmaker from Riga and the Renaissance Basque mystic, one has to start by considering Eisenstein's theory of imaginicity (*obraznost*), masterfully expounded in two fundamental essays on montage, entitled simply 'Montage 1937' et 'Montage 1938'.<sup>24</sup>

In both articles Eisenstein argues, among other things, that the material or representational images of a film – what he terms *izobrazhenie* – are likely, by virtue of their composition or of the relations they entertain with other images in a montage sequence, to give rise within the spectator's mind to mental associations subsumable to a concept, an emotion, or a theme. This is what Eisenstein refers to by the Russian word *obraz*, which is usually translated by such expressions as 'global image' or 'generalized image'. In 'Montage 1937', Eisenstein begins by explaining that a film must enable the spectator to perceive more than meets the eye; it must enable the spectator to perceive the depiction's underlying ideas and thoughts. The spectator, claims Eisenstein, must be able to grasp both the essence (or truth) of what is depicted as well as the artist's attitude towards it.<sup>25</sup>

It is worth mentioning that such reference to the artist's attitude towards what is depicted is not without importance within the context of Marxism and Soviet communism. What is at stake here is an attempt by Eisenstein to suture onto material and historical reality – that of the artist and that of the work – what may otherwise seem like a metaphysical quest for some sort of essence, not unrelated to Plato's version of rhetoric and its quest for transcendent Ideas. Eisenstein was quite conscious of this problem as a result of the setbacks he suffered with *Bezhin Meadow*, which is why he wrote

<sup>23</sup> See Eisenstein Rodin et Rilke in *Cinématisme* (Bruxelles Editions Complexes 1980) pp 249–82

<sup>24</sup> In Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor (eds) *Selected Works, Volume II Towards a Theory of Montage* (London British Film Institute, 1991), pp 11–58 296–326

<sup>25</sup> Here is what Eisenstein writes a generalization about an object as distinct from the object itself "an und für sich" is a separate entity related to the artist's individual consciousness and is an expression of his attitudes towards and judgments about the objects in question, a self-expression mediated as it were through the author's consciousness and reflecting the context of social relationships in which the artist's personality has been formed In 'Montage 1937' pp 28–9

26 Ibid p 47

27 For Eisenstein in proper Marxist form the emergence of philosophical concepts and ideas is determined by historical and material conditions of existence that is by the infrastructure. See his brief comments on the formation of concepts in *Montage 1937* p 30

28 Ibid p 50

29 Ernst Gombrich *Icons Symbolicae* in *Gombrich on the Renaissance* Volume II (London Phaidon 1972) pp 123–91

the following warning which he addressed to himself in self-critical fashion ‘To venture into this kind of “super-generalization” always entails a certain risk. If taken too far, it inevitably lapses into metaphysics and mysticism.’<sup>26</sup> Yet this apology should not deceive us. Eisenstein’s willingness to introduce a historical aspect to the production of the global image only partially relativizes it. In fact, the global image soon loses its arbitrariness when its author adopts an attitude or a point of view commensurate with that of the proletarian class. Hence, notwithstanding all that separates Marxism from metaphysics,<sup>27</sup> Marxist truth here easily substitutes for metaphysical Truth.

Only if the author belongs to the proletarian class or projects the viewpoint of that class on the subject matter will his treatment not be an *arbitrary refraction* of the event but a true revelation of that event or phenomenon. For only that class possesses the immutable weapon of Marxism-Leninism, which is capable of tearing away every mask and laying bare the very essence of a phenomenon beneath whatever ‘appearances’ it may assume, this will be so, however unexpected or paradoxical the structuring of the subject matter may seem at times to be.<sup>28</sup>

In short, then, according to Eisenstein’s theory of imaginicity, the task of the filmmaker consists of creating cinematic depictions which can also be perceived as images of essences. Consequently, filmic images must be composed or edited so that they resemble the essences or truths they unravel. They act as stand-ins or signs for the truths which they also embody, and from which – on the basis of resemblance – they receive their efficacy, their ability to impact on the spectator. In this regard, Eisenstein’s theory offers much more than a symbolist or conventionalist (nominalist) approach according to which a given image (say, the hammer and sickle) may stand for an idea (Communism).

In fact, Eisenstein’s theory is much closer in spirit to the way Renaissance neo-Platonists thought of images, both in terms of painting and mnemonics. Drawing from the work of Yates, Ernst Gombrich<sup>29</sup> has clearly shown the influence of the art of memory and of rhetoric on painting, most notably on allegories and personifications, during the Renaissance. Such artworks, he claims, are legacies of ancient rhetoric and of its *memoria*, which requires, as we have seen, that internal images – standing for the words or things we wish to remember – be produced before being imprinted onto the soft wax of our memory. Under the joint influence of neo-Platonism and Christianity, Renaissance philosophers and artists worked at relating the images of the art of memory, their pictorial embodiment in allegories and personifications, and the transcendent Platonic Forms or Ideas of the suprasensible universe. This resulted in a metaphysical aesthetic according to which the work of art can

appear as a window onto the Divine world of Platonic Ideas. For the spectator, contact with such a work of art leads to a state of ecstasy and intellectual intuition, to a leap out of one's self towards the intelligible world of Truth and God.

In this context, hermetic philosophers such as Ficino, Camillo or Bruno could easily conceive the existence of images – either real paintings, such as Botticelli's *Primavera* or *Birth of Venus*, or mental images such as those of rhetoric and the art of memory – capable, through sheer mimetism or sympathy, to so grasp the essence of what they depict and embody as to acquire its cosmic or natural forces. Such images were said to possess magical efficacy, to act magically on whomsoever gazed upon them – as deduced by the strong emotional reactions they would arouse; and to introduce their spectators to the superior knowledge of Divine Forms.

It is fair to say that there exist obvious points of contact between Eisenstein's theory of imaginicity and the Renaissance's metaphysical aesthetic. Of course, Marxism prevents Eisenstein from embracing the magical or hermetic aspects of this aesthetic. Yet the Master from Riga still very much recognizes the power of images which he also tries to account for in terms of ecstasy. And while he avoids looking for the image's efficacy in celestial bodies and in the Divine unity of terrestrial, celestial and supracellular spheres, Eisensteinian ecstasy still remains attached to nature and to its laws as well as to the unity of contraries by means of the notion of organicity as it is developed throughout *Nonindifferent Nature*. I shall return later to the argument Eisenstein makes in this book. Suffice to say that its importance, as far as I am concerned here, lies in the way in which Eisenstein uses the notion of pathos to connect ecstasy and imaginicity, thus relating ecstasy – whose model remains Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* – to memory. For the moment, though, I shall return to imaginicity and the global image.

There is no doubt that Eisenstein conceived of the global image within the general framework of rhetoric. This is obvious, for instance, in 'Montage 1937', in which he both connects and contrasts it with metaphor. Drawing from an exercise in stage direction (a VGIK class assignment on the stage adaptation of a scene from Balzac's *Père Goriot*) and from an example of *mise-en-cadre* (a shot depicting a barricade), Eisenstein explains that the global image constitutes not so much a metaphor on its own as the synthesis of metaphorical connotations or associations resulting from a given *mise-en-scène*, *mise-en-cadre* or montage. In other words, the metaphor is but the middle term enabling the mediation between the depiction of an object (the action of the stage play, the barricade) and its global image (the essence or truth of the object). Commenting on the *mise-en-cadre* of the barricade, Eisenstein writes: 'Its compositional elements are so disposed that each is read as a metaphor, and the sum total of all of them is read as an image of

struggle, i.e. as a generalized image of the inner content of what is depicted'.<sup>30</sup> It is important, therefore, clearly to distinguish between metaphor and global image, the former serving to give access to the latter, and thus ensuring the transition from the sensible (the object depicted) to the non-sensible (the essence of the object). Thus what we need to consider here in relation to rhetoric – understood as a mediation towards essence – is the way in which it requires, as a precondition, the joint labour of memory and imagination

One has to wait until 'Montage 1938', however, before seeing memory explicitly taken up by Eisenstein's theory of imaginicity. Here, the global image is presented as the artistic counterpart to what, in real life, also results from the joint labour of memory and imagination. The example used by Eisenstein is extremely revealing in this regard, and, despite its length, requires that I cite it in its entirety:

In New York the majority of streets do not have names; instead, they are indicated by numbers: 5th Avenue, 42nd Street and so on. For visitors this method of designated streets can at first make it difficult to remember them. We are used to streets having names, and this makes life much easier for us, because a name instantly evokes an image of the street, i.e. merely by pronouncing the appropriate name a specific cluster of perceptions arises along with the image.

I found it very difficult to remember images of the streets of New York and consequently to know these streets. Streets given such neutral designations as '42nd Street' or '45th Street' simply did not evoke in me any images adding up to a perception of what they looked like. To help me in this, I had to memorize a set of objects which would come into my mind in response to the signal '42nd' as distinct from the signal '45th'. In my memory I accumulated theatres, cinemas, shops, buildings, etc., that were characteristic of each of the streets I needed to remember. This memorizing process proceeded by distinct stages, of which I can single out two, in the first of them, my memory responded to the verbal designation '42nd Street' by recalling with great difficulty the entire sequence of features which characterized that street, but this did not evoke a real perception of the street, because the separate elements had not yet merged into a single image.

Only at the second stage did all these elements begin to fuse into a single, emerging image: at the mention of the street's number there arose a whole swarm of separate elements of that street, though not as a chain but as a whole, as a complete picture of the street, as its total image.

Not until that moment could it be said that I really remembered the street. The image of that street came to life in my mind and senses in exactly the way that in the course of experiencing a

work of art its elements gradually coalesce into a single, unforgettable total image.

In both cases – be it the process of recollection or the process of appreciating a work of art – it remains true that a unified experience enters our mind and emotions through the whole, and the whole does through the image. This image enters our consciousness and through its totality every detail of it is also preserved in our memory inseparably from the whole. This may be an image in sound, some kind of rhythmic and melodic sound picture, or it may be a three-dimensional image, to which separate elements of the mnemonic series have contributed pictorially.

By one route or another, a set of ideas enters our mind, forming a complete image composed of the separate elements

We have seen that in the process of remembering there are two essential stages; the first is that of the formation of an image, the second is the result of that first stage and its significance for memorization. At the same time it is important for our memory to give as little attention as possible to the first stage and, bypassing the process of formation, to arrive at the result as quickly as possible. This is what happens in real life, unlike the process that occurs in art; for in the proceeding from life into the realm of art we observe a distinct shifting of the stress. In arriving at the result, a work of art directs all the subtlety of its method towards the process

A work of art, understood dynamically, is also a process of forming images in the mind of the spectator. Herein lies the peculiar quality of every genuinely vital work of art, which distinguishes it from a lifeless piece of work in which the spectator is presented with a depiction of the results of a certain past creative process instead of being drawn into a permanently occurring process<sup>31</sup>

31 Eisenstein, 'Montage 1938', pp 301–2

By means of an architectural analogy that alludes to the mnemonic rules of ancient rhetoric, Eisenstein here openly refers to memory as the foundation for his theory of imaginicity. The global image is now unambiguously presented in its role or capacity as the *memoria* of a work of art. To put it differently, yet without radically distorting Eisenstein's idea, it becomes possible to envisage the global image as the knowledge of the work, understood here both as the knowledge which makes possible its cinematic expression and the knowledge whose construction by the spectator it oversees. In discussing the global image, Eisenstein's thinking thus touches upon an implicit – but no less fundamental – aim of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, which consists in using images (or the imagination) in order to assist the exercitant in constructing a *memoria*. In short, the spectatorial subject put forth by Eisenstein's doctrine of imaginicity appears, with regard to memory and imagination, as a likely



counterpart to Loyola's exercitant. Both exercitant and spectator are considered according to the power of memory and their ability to project images onto the 'inner cinema' of the soul or mind. What is more, both Loyola and Eisenstein recognize the importance of controlling this imaginative process in order to predetermine as much as possible the construction of a *memoria* or imaginary.

To this end, Eisenstein proposes that the filmmaker use rhetorical devices (metaphorical associations, and so on) in order to translate onto the film the contents of his own inner screen. The filmmaker, in other words, must use figures or tropes cinematically to depict the images and mental associations that inhabit him and that are related to the theme (or knowledge) he seeks to illustrate in his film. Here, the filmmaker sets forth what rhetoricians call the *topoi* – the places that frame the labour of the imagination and ensure its shaping of memory. Eisenstein describes the process in the following manner:

A certain image hovers in front of the author's inward eye, an image which for him is an emotional embodiment of the theme of his work. He is then faced with the task of turning that image into two or three partial depictions, which in combination and juxtaposition will evoke in the mind and emotions of the perceiver precisely that initial generalized image which the author saw with his mind's eye.<sup>32</sup>

32 Ibid. p. 308

The spectator must be led to follow a path similar to that of the filmmaker, his own inner images now subjugated to a theme or global image:

The spectator is forced to follow the same creative path that the author followed when creating the image. The spectator does not only see the depicted elements of the work, he also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and formation of the image in the same way that the author experienced it. The strength of the montage method lies also in the fact that the spectator is drawn into a creative act of a kind in which his individual nature is not only not enslaved to the individuality of the author but is deployed to the full by a fusion with the author's purpose. In fact, every spectator in his own way – from his past experience, from the depth of his imagination, from the web of his mental associations, from the given preconditions of his character, temperament and social origin – creates an image according to those precisely chosen depictions suggested to him by the author, and which lead inexorably to understanding and experiencing the theme of the work. This is the same image that has been conceived by the author, but that image will also have been simultaneously brought into being by a creative act on the part of the spectator.<sup>33</sup>

33 Ibid. pp. 309–310

In principle, then, the spectator – much like Loyola's exercitant – is

relatively free in exercising his imagination, in constructing his own *memoria*, yet only within the confines of the proposed *topoi* which limit or frame the labour of the imagination. For the spectator, this framing is delineated by the film's images and is thus itself framed by – or subordinated to – the global image that 'hovers in front of the [filmmaker's] inward eye' This framing explains why, according to Eisenstein, the spectator may also experience the global image. In fact, even though the spectator's mental associations differ from the filmmaker's, even though the inner images produced by his imagination are his own and no one else's, such associations, such images, explains Eisenstein, can (or rather must) lead the spectator to uncover the global image by means of which they cohere and unify. One way of explaining Eisenstein's argument could be to consider the type/token distinction that one finds in logic. Take chairs, for instance. There are numerous varieties of chairs: some are made of wood, others of plastic or metal, some are large, some small, some are comfortable, others not. Yet they are all related by a type – or, as Wittgenstein would have it, by a family resemblance. In the same way, Eisenstein asks that we consider the filmmaker's and the spectator's mental associations as being related to the same global image (and therefore as sharing a family resemblance) through the film's material or representational images. In Eisenstein's case the process – resembling that on which are premised Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* – builds on the belief in a form of intersubjectivity that ensures the fusion between individual and collective aspects of the *memoria* or, to put it differently, that ensures the anchoring of an individual imaginary to a given collective imaginary. One of the goals of the *Spiritual Exercises* is to reconcile the exercitant's individual imaginary to a collective Roman Catholic imaginary. This is why they frame the labour of the imagination around Catholic imagery or *topoi* while purging the exercitant's soul of all impure images. The new imaginary or *memoria*, achieved and reinforced through regular practice of the Exercises, will be the object of Jesuit predication as they attempt to spread it all over the world, *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*. But what about Eisenstein? What *topos* does he use to frame the spectator's imagination?

### Ecstasy and memory

The answers to these questions are found in *Nonindifferent Nature*, in Eisenstein's own ecstatic memory, and in his attempts to conceptualize such inner experience through the notions of pathos, organicity, and ecstasy.

I shall start with the notion of ecstasy. It is worth remembering that it is Eisenstein's endeavour to define ecstasy as well as his efforts to discover a way of engaging the spectator to experience it

that lead him to Loyola Eisenstein is particularly interested in a fragment from Loyola's *Interna mentis sensa*, which was a diary St Ignatius kept for himself and of which only two notebooks have survived. Eisenstein is intrigued by a passage in which Loyola details one of his mystical visions. He explains that the vision started by a view of the Divine essence of Trinity under the guise of a luminous sphere, from which later emerged the Father.<sup>34</sup> This is all Eisenstein needs to grasp what he believes to be the foundation of ecstatic experience, which he expounds by way of this succinct formula: 'participating [communion] with the principle, and *then the image of the father*'.<sup>35</sup> The reason why this formula is so terse is that the first half of *Nonindifferent Nature* continually belabours the idea. We find it again therefore, albeit in a somewhat different form, in the chapter devoted to Zola, where Eisenstein seeks to account for one of the strongest phases of ecstatic experience. This is one of the book's most revealing definitions of ecstasy, in that it clearly relates ecstasy to the problems raised by the theory imaginicity: 'This is the moment in which one experiences the feeling of unity in variety the feeling of a single generalizing law that extends through all the variety of single (apparently) accidental phenomena of nature, of reality, of history, of science'.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, this experience, he later adds, is not in itself religious and 'can also be coupled with images that are totally unreligious'.<sup>37</sup> In Eisenstein's view, therefore, Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* appear as a (highly successful) scheme or strategy for introducing religious images into an experience which is not religious by itself, a strategy which, as we have already seen, requires the formation of a *memoria*.

But how does memory enter into Eisenstein's theory of ecstasy? To answer, I need briefly to consider how both filmmaker and spectator may, according to Eisenstein, be led to experience ecstasy. This is where the notions of pathos and organicity come into the picture.

As a theoretical notion, pathos first appeared in Eisenstein's writings during the mid 1920s and has endured throughout the different phases of his theorizing, all the way to *Nonindifferent Nature* – although not without undergoing some changes. What interests me here concerns what I take to be important, though implicit, points of contact between pathos, as defined in *Nonindifferent Nature*, and imaginicity, as defined in 'Montage 1937' and 'Montage 1938'. Beginning with the very first chapter of *Nonindifferent Nature* (entitled 'On the structure of things'), where Eisenstein asks of his readers that they consider how one should proceed in order to depict grief on film, pathos unambiguously treads over some of the theoretical ground previously covered by the notion of global image. For beneath the issue of grief lies a more vital issue that, in Eisenstein's own words, concerns 'the problem of representation and the relationship [attitude] to what is being

34 Eisenstein refers to a passage of Loyola's diary dated 6 March 1544. It is quoted from A. Poulain, *Des Grâces d'oraison. Traité de théologie mystique* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1931), p. 282. Poulain's transcription of the passage is incomplete, however. See Ignace de Loyola, *Journal des motions intérieures*, in Maurice Giuliani (ed.), *Œuvres* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), § 121.

35 Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature*, p. 173.

36 Ibid., p. 86.

37 Ibid., p. 181.

38 Ibid., p. 3

represented’<sup>38</sup> Was this not precisely a question raised by both ‘Montage 1937’ and ‘Montage 1938’ – a question to which the global image was given the task of answering by directly addressing the problem of the filmmaker’s attitude towards what is being represented? This initial family resemblance between pathos and the global image is further developed a few pages later, when Eisenstein defines ‘pathetic’ composition as ‘a construction that primarily serves as an embodiment of the author’s relation to the content and at the same time forces the viewer also to relate to [that is, to adopt a similar attitude toward] this content’<sup>39</sup> Once again, the similarity between pathos and imaginicity is quite clear, especially since both seem to share analogous functions. I believe therefore that we can, in all likelihood, conclude that the pathos of a work, as defined by *Nonindifferent Nature*, corresponds to the global image seen from the point of view of its composition and emotional – or ‘pathetic’ – effect on the spectator. To which Eisenstein adds ‘that the effect of the pathos of a work consists in bringing the viewer to the point of ecstasy’<sup>40</sup>

39 Ibid., p. 28

40 Ibid., p. 27

But if pathos leads to ecstasy, it is because the latter, Eisenstein writes, is what is felt by the artist, ‘especially in those cases when not only his individual work suddenly arises out of all the parts that flowed together in it, uniting and sublimating these separate parts into an organically whole work of art, but even more so, in those cases when the creator (of a very high calibre) experiences the whole of his opus as a great unity.’<sup>41</sup> This is to say that in the final outcome, ecstasy relies on the ‘pathetic’ (emotional) explosion of the global image, according to which the different mental associations and inner images of the filmmaker (or the spectator) coalesce into one great unified whole

41 Ibid., p. 87

There exists a short essay ‘Torito’, written by Eisenstein in 1934, in which he perfectly describes this process of unification of particulars within an organic whole. Here he comments on the visual composition of a shot taken from *¡Que Viva Mexico!* in an attempt to illustrate the play of mental associations – that is, the labour of memory – that has presided over the shot’s construction and ensured its success. The task of the essay, explains Eisenstein, is to ‘untangle the knot of secondary associations, early impressions and the facts of a previous experience’<sup>42</sup> that have inspired the composition and determined the assembly of a series of precise elements: the *péon* with his straw hat and his white *sarape*, the *torito* and, in the background, the archway of a hacienda where one finds vats full of *pulque*. The associations, impressions and elements of the experience mentioned by Eisenstein belong to different stages of his life and end up merging in the frame: childhood images of Venice (the Palace of Doges, the lion of St Mark) which Sergei Mikhailovitch’s father had brought back from his trips for his young son, works by De Chirico seen in Paris in 1930, a surrealist montage by Max Ernst in an open

42 Eisenstein ‘Torito’ in Richard Taylor (ed.), *Beyond the Stars: the Memoirs of Sergei Eisenstein*, trans. William Powell (London and Calcutta: British Film Institute and Seagull Books, 1995), p. 743

book seen in the window of a bookstore on the boulevard Montparnasse, the cover of a book read when Eisenstein was a young boy (*Nat Pinkerton*), the opera *La Khovanchtchina*, a dictionary page seen by chance where Eisenstein finds the etymology of the word 'candidate', a childhood daydream related to the Dreyfus Affair 'In any event', notes Eisenstein, 'these compositional associations, diametrically opposed though they were in form and content, merged quite seamlessly with the Mexican models' <sup>43</sup>

43 Ibid p 751

There are obvious similarities here with the way Eisenstein describes the emergence of an inner or global image of the streets of New York, for it is memory, once more, that provides the stuff from which emerges the global image of 'Mexicanness'. What strikes me here is the way this process fully matches the definitions of ecstasy we have already seen. This is sufficient, to my mind, to posit a clear relation between memory and ecstasy in Eisenstein. And in this sense, the example offered by 'Torito' can lead us to formulate the likely hypothesis that the notion of ecstasy is used by Eisenstein in an attempt to conceptualize a very precise emotional or affective aspect of the *memoria* (or knowledge, or imaginary) of a work, as it manifests itself through a global image. Eisenstein characterizes this affect as the 'subjective experience' <sup>44</sup> of the laws of nature or, as the French translators have put it, as the subjective sensation of 'emotionally living these laws' ('la sensation subjective de vivre émotionnellement ces lois') <sup>45</sup>. This is the feeling that arises from a communion with the laws of nature, of existence, of becoming, and of the formation of the Universe.

44 Eisenstein *Nonindifferent Nature*  
p 175

45 Eisenstein, *La Non-indifférente nature* Volume 1: *Oeuvres* tome 2 trans. Luda and Jean Schnitzer (Paris: UGE 1976), p 375

It remains that for Eisenstein, not all global images can lead the spectator to this state of ecstasy. Memory has to be enriched in a precise fashion by 'pathetic' images, compositions or montages, whose specificity it is to reproduce or mimic in their formal structuring the 'laws by which nonartificial phenomena – "organic", natural phenomena – are structured' <sup>46</sup>. In short, the filmmaker's task is to lead the spectator to mentally stage, onto the screen of his own inner cinema, images so emotionally charged as to enable him to connect and unite with the essence of the laws of Nature, of Thought, and of History. Such connection is possible, explains Eisenstein, because the laws in question regulate all manifestations of matter, including human beings, who are thus equally subjugated by them.

46 Eisenstein *Nonindifferent Nature*  
p 12

We should not be amazed here by the similarities that exist between what Eisenstein upholds and the beliefs held by certain artists and other hermetic practitioners of the art of memory during the Renaissance for which inner images lead to knowledge about the nature of the world as seen through the union of microcosm and macrocosm and the reconciliation of contraries within the unity of the One. But such similarity, I hasten to add, is purely formal. Eisenstein, it goes without saying, is not a Renaissance magus and it

47 I am referring here to Friedrich Engels' *Dialectics of Nature*, trans. Clemens Duit (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1934). Regarding the Eisensteinian idea of organicity, David Bordwell also notes the influence of literary critic Vissarion Belinsky on the Soviet filmmaker. Through Belinsky, he writes, Soviet Socialist Realist aestheticians 'inherited from German idealism the concept of the artwork as a significant whole'. David Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 178.

would be rather foolish to try and connect the Marxist (or Engelsian) theory of organicity,<sup>47</sup> to which Eisenstein is greatly indebted, with the theology that informs Renaissance mnemonics. This is certainly not my position. More to the point is the fact that both dialectical materialism and theology are ways of seeing, of understanding, and of making sense of the world. Also, both Eisenstein and the practitioners of the Renaissance arts of memory conceive of images as a privileged means for communicating and instituting such ways of seeing, for they are the very stuff of memory. In short, what Eisenstein, Renaissance hermetic philosophers and artists, and Ignatius of Loyola all share, is a sort of iconophilia, a belief in the power of images to institute a memory – a semiotic matrix – as a coherent, organized and unified way of seeing the world; to institute, in other words, an imaginary.

For Eisenstein, then, the dialectical laws of nature ensure the connection between the individual *memoria* of the spectator (or filmmaker) and a collective *memoria*. The latter, unlike the catholic *memoria* of Loyola's *Exercises*, is a socialist and revolutionary *memoria*, whose principal figure – that of the dialectical and qualitative leap – finds its source in Engels's *Dialectics of Nature*. The function of Engels's work is thus to frame or restrict Eisenstein's appeal to the imagination in order to shape the spectator's memory. This is where, in other words, the *topoi* of Eisensteinian *memoria* originate. Consequently, Eisenstein prescribes the use of images that represent the laws of nature for framing the spectator's imaginative labour.

only that figurative quality 'teases' the imagination at whose basis – in whose structure – lies one of the profoundly natural laws, which is the embodiment into an object of a certain profoundly natural process . . .

Such are the features of a 'figurative' representation [images] of growth, the connection of the generations, the passage of the generations, into each other.<sup>48</sup>

48 Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature* p. 198

If it is important that the spectator's imagination be 'teased', it is because ecstasy (literally, the state of being beside oneself), presupposes the fabrication of inner images – of *imagines agentes* or moving images (in both senses of the term) – and the institution of a memory, or semiotic matrix, of which it is the emotional register. And in this regard, Eisenstein clearly follows the lesson of Loyola. In both cases, a scheme is elaborated for soliciting the imagination in a limited or topical fashion so that it can produce, for memory, those inner images which are deemed important in enabling the subject (exercitant or film spectator) to bring his *electio* to term, or to achieve his role or mission, or, in the case of Eisenstein's spectator, to perform a leap out of, or 'beside', himself. The inner images are not neutral but accompanied by an emotional charge – as

are dreams and other inner images. The experience of ecstasy Eisenstein describes refers precisely to the emotional state that accompanies the labour of the imagination in its shaping of a *memoria*

Seen from this perspective, the whole theoretical effort behind *Nonindifferent Nature* begins to appear as an attempt to recover this emotional state – a emotional state most probably felt by Eisenstein himself through the labour of his own imagination and the institution of a *memoria* of which this book is the narrative – and, by way of the notion of organicity, of putting it to work for the benefit of dialectical materialism. This is what makes of *Nonindifferent Nature* an authentic practical treatise in socialist aesthetics.

Yet this is not where lies the real significance of the book. For behind its prescriptive nature we find Eisenstein's fundamental acknowledgement of the role the imagination can play in the spectator's encounter with works of art and in the institution of a memory of these works that can ecstatically transport us, and transform our ways of seeing through a qualitative leap. This is why memory can be seen as a semiotic matrix, that is, as the foundation of our semiotic dealings with the world, including, of course, our thoughts and actions. Yet is it not the peculiarity of Eisenstein's montagist theories – from his early work on attractions to his theory of ecstasy – to acknowledge the spectator's potential for staging images on his inner screen and thus institute a memory? This acknowledgement, one might add, is equally central to his filmmaking activities as he continually strove to shape and model the spectator's memory according to his own revolutionary beliefs. And in this regard, his meeting with Loyola may have been purely inevitable.

### **The rhetoric of newfound worlds**

To conclude this essay I would like to return to the issue of rhetoric and figurative discourse in Eisenstein and, at the same time, touch briefly on his filmmaking. As we have seen, Eisenstein envisions a cinematic practice where images, through mise-en-scene, mise-en-cadre, and montage – images that are produced, in other words through the apparatus of cinema – serve to support and frame the spectator's labour of invention or imagination. These images, in short, must enable the spectator to find – by means of the analogical paths of the imagination – the idea or theme, as well as emotional register, responsible for their initial cinematic structuring. In developing this theory, Eisenstein often refers to his own work as a filmmaker. Consequently, as I suggested at the start of this essay, many commentators, inspired both by Eisenstein's theory and films, have produced analyses – some of them remarkable – dealing with

the figures and tropes that pullulate in Eisenstein's cinema. Some, like the one produced by Marie-Claire Ropars some years ago, even seek to link Eisensteinian tropology to ideology. 'It becomes necessary', wrote Ropars, 'to question not only the functioning of these metaphors, but also their function within a discourse of revolutionary exaltation'. And she adds: 'Rhetoric and ideology go together'.<sup>49</sup> I could not agree more. Yet it seems to me that we shall not be able fully to grasp the function and impact of this discursive practice as long as we conceive of it from the point of view of a restricted rhetoric from which memory is excised.

50 This, of course, is a debatable claim: yet only as long as one does not compare the cinema with the other, much older, arts where the terms 'traditions and memories' really take on their full meaning.

Finally, with regard to history, Eisenstein found himself to be in an important and privileged situation in which two new worlds, two imaginaries, were in need of institution: that of the Soviet revolution and that of the cinema. Neither of them yet possessed any strong or fully developed traditions, or memories.<sup>50</sup> Eisenstein's genius is to have grasped the importance of rhetoric and in particular that of *memoria* for this context. For it is more than likely that all real social changes or transformations in *épistémè* are accompanied by a new individual and collective memory. In short, this implies acknowledging the role of representation and mediation in shaping the individual and collective integration of change that constitutes a source for emotion, action and thought. In this respect, the films of Eisenstein are veritable monuments or memory palaces where, by means of images, is instituted a memory of the revolution and of the nascent Soviet people.

As is well known, however, it turned out that for various reasons which fall beyond the purview of this article, Eisenstein's efforts at instituting a revolutionary *memoria* quickly clashed with the imaginary which the Soviet ruling class endeavoured to institute instead with Socialist Realism. But Eisenstein's rhetorical efforts have not all been in vain, especially since he has managed to bequeath posterity a rich memory of cinema. The factory of *The Strike*, the lions from the Odessa steps, the Winter Palace or the 'God and Country' montage from *October*, and the frozen landscape of Nevsky, the breathtaking visual compositions of *Ivan the Terrible* Parts I and II, are not only memory places of the Soviet revolution, they are also important memory places of our own cinematic *memoria*, of our film culture. Furthermore, they still arouse our imagination and thus continue to enrich our memory – albeit often in ways that Eisenstein's theory could not predict.



## Continuous sex: the editing of homosexuality in *Bound* and *Rope*

LEE WALLACE

It is, perhaps, to be expected that the notorious invisibility of lesbianism would leave its mark on the cinematic style of a film whose plot development plays on the impossibility of lesbian legibility. Less predictable, however, is the way the Wachowski brothers' sexual thriller, *Bound* (1996), is everywhere structured by its attempts to visualize lesbianism, to make it succumb, once and for all, to the order of the visible. While the elusiveness of homosexuality is crucial to the film's narrative, *Bound* simultaneously requires lesbianism to function evidentially, to disclose itself within a visual field. Under this representational double bind, the film frequently compensates for the indeterminacy of sexuality with cinematic technique. In the enigmatic opening sequence, for instance, Corky (Gina Gershon) – shortly identified as an ex-con, good with her hands – lies unconscious, bound and gagged at the bottom of a closet, the tight dimensions of which the mobile camera has distorted with its wide-angle focus and first vertical, then horizontal, trajectory, so that the place of confinement is oddly capacious, holding as it does not just a limp body but the fetishized accessories that could be said to constitute both her character and that of her accomplice, Violet (Jennifer Tilly). Like many things in *Bound*, this scene invites a parallel with Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948). It would seem that the Wachowskis are deploying Hitchcock's famous moving camera in the one place he never allowed it: the closed space which holds the body. Toward the end of *Rope*'s dinner party, when Jimmy Stewart finally lifts the lid of the chest that hides the strangled victim, the camera-shot continues to conceal that much anticipated sight.

1 D.A. Miller 'Anal Rope', in Diana Fuss (ed.) *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) p. 137

offscreen. The circumspection of Hitchcock's framing, according to D.A. Miller, has little to do with the conventions of a murder plot that generically requires the discovery of a corpse and everything to do with the 'pathways of symbolic signification' that inevitably return to the sexual status of the young man's asphyxiated body. Miller goes on to argue that the 'obscurity' of the aroused male body "murdered" from behind, and its implications for a heterosexual visual economy mortgaged to castration anxiety, require that the young man's body remain hidden for the duration of Hitchcock's film.<sup>1</sup> However, the still-breathing body discovered inside *Bound*'s most recessed space, far from remaining unseen, is repeatedly submitted to the trial of visibility. Not once, but three times *Bound* revisits the spectacle of the restrained figure held in the dark; and that female body's vulnerability to the camera's investigative eye returns us, as unflinching as Hitchcock's visual reticence, to a consideration of its homosexual status.

In the inaugural scene, the camera's discovery of that body is obscurely diagnostic. Entering the closet from above and commencing its high-angle descent, the tracking camera curiously elongates the distance from the patterned hatboxes neatly aligned across two high shelves, down past the metal hangers which hold Violet's visually foreshortened synthetic dresses, to the rows of white heels that gleam out of shadow nearer to the floor before panning across to Corky's heavy black boots, dark drill pants, cotton tank and labrys tattoo. Throughout, disconnected samples of dialogue in female and male voiceover, both seductive and aggressive, echo across the scene, never quite coalescing into anything like a sequence: 'I had this image of you inside of me, like a part of me', 'You planned this whole thing', 'Where's the fucking money?' Disorienting in spatial and acoustic terms, the shot nonetheless establishes a visual continuity between the feminine accoutrements of Violet's wardrobe and the butch tackle worn by Corky throughout the film, so that the optically attenuated space between them is narratively abbreviated – or, in character terms, reduced – so that Corky's dykey taste in fashion verifies the lesbian potential of Violet's own. Having placed these feminine and masculine garments in some soon to be elaborated relation, the camera, now settled at floor level, holds on Corky's attractively battered face, stopping short of knitting into her character those other props which also contribute to the sexually suggestive quality of the scene: the rope, the gag, the designer bruises.

Ellis Hanson's description of *Bound*'s opening sequence similarly draws attention to the visual and sexual ambivalence of this scene:

Once the title disappears from the screen, we are unsure what we are looking at. We cannot make sense of the shapes on the screen. Slowly they resolve themselves into a scene in which a woman

bound with rope is trapped in a closet. The visual cues slip from bondage as sexual play to bondage as sexual assault – and so we are still unsure what we are looking at. We cannot fix the scene or the fantasy that motivates it. A woman is in the closet, in bondage, and yet her very restraints, not to mention all those shiny shoes, turn the bondage into a fetish and release the very eroticism that closets are supposed to negate.<sup>2</sup>

2 Ellis Hanson (ed.), *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1999) p. 3

As this quotation from Hanson suggests, it would be hard to underestimate the resonance of this opening scene for contemporary theorizations of lesbian representation. Since Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argued the historical pertinence of this figure for modern understandings of homosexual/heterosexual distinction, the closet has become the governing trope through which the impossibility of homosexual containment is understood.<sup>3</sup> Far from being an architectural site, let alone a secure one, the closet functions as an epistemic figure which organizes the relations of knowledge and ignorance which inadequately cordon off homosexuality from the heterosexuality for which it is everywhere mistaken. The closet, in this sense, is oddly expansive, though finally restrictive in the revelations it orchestrates, its permeability always in the service of holding a distinction – however unstable that line may prove to be – between in and out, gay and straight. *Bound*'s closet, and the narrative it initiates, does indeed function as a sexual proscenium, staging the display of lesbian identity in a visual register that is not without its own troublesome relation to the unreliability of homosexual difference. Notoriously obscure, sexuality is, after all, the last thing to submit to regimes of full and final disclosure.

3 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990)

The question of lesbian recognition, its difficult emergence within a visual field enthralled by heterosexual difference, is foregrounded throughout *Bound* both thematically and stylistically. The film's plot, an elaborate confidence heist, depends on the invisibility of same-sex desire and the uncertainty of sexual affiliation. Corky and Violet, thrown together by little more than the proximity of two apartments – Violet's own and the vacant one next door (number 1003) which Corky has been hired to make over – start an affair, unbeknownst to Violet's longtime mobster boyfriend, Caesar (Joe Pantoliano). When two million dollars of mafia money comes into Caesar's care, Violet sees a way 'out' but needs Corky's help to steal the money and leave herself clean. The planned 'redistribution of wealth' involves a straightforward theft from Caesar's and Violet's apartment, but when Caesar discovers the money has gone, instead of running, as the women anticipate, he decides to brazen it out with the mob's collectors, holding Violet hostage to his plans. While it occurs to Caesar that Violet might be capable of double-crossing him with Johnnie Marzoni (Christopher Meloni), who has been fingered in the set-up, it never occurs to him that she might be in cahoots with

someone outside the orbit of the mob, let alone that of heterosexuality. Invisible though their criminal pact is to the sexually myopic Caesar, the film nonetheless ‘uses the whole gamut of classic scopophilic lures – carefully staged sex scenes, fetishistic costumes, killer cosmetics, shadowy lighting, voyeuristic point-of-view shots, and so on – to help [the viewer] recognise the sexual intensity of the relationship between the two female leads, Violet and Corky. There is a desire that the men in the film cannot see, though the women hide it in plain sight.’<sup>4</sup> Thus, while Corky’s butchness is worn like an ID, a credential as assertive as the low-slung badge of the lesbian cop who confronts her at her local bar, Violet’s allegiance to the sartorial codes of femininity makes her sexual registration more dubious, capable as she is of magnetizing the attraction of both the lesbian Corky and most of the dark-suited men the plot sends her way. Caesar, Johnnie, the hangdog Shelley (Barry Kivel) – who has siphoned off the two million dollars in the first place but seems unable to leave without Violet – and the paternalistic Mickey (John P. Ryan), whose romantic attentiveness disguises many of the plot’s implausibilities, including its resolution.

Violet’s dubious sexuality is foregrounded in *Bound*’s first seduction scene. With Caesar absent, Violet calls Corky to her apartment to retrieve an earring from the sink, a lure so old that even Corky is wise to it. Earring restored, the two leads move to the darker environs of the living room where they take up the drinks which etiquette dictates. Violet continues to come on to Corky who still gives nothing away, her suspicion of Violet running as high as her curiosity. ‘What are you doing?’ Corky asks, after Violet has taken her hand and lifted it to her own tattooed breast. ‘Trying to seduce you’, is Violet’s disingenuous reply, before she attempts to assuage any doubts Corky might have about her motivation by demonstrating its sexual quality. ‘You can’t believe what you see, but you can believe what you feel’, says Violet who, first moistening Corky’s finger in her mouth, proceeds to place Corky’s hand between her thighs. Violet’s invitation and the gesture which accompanies it draw attention to just how artificial things are, both Violet’s seemingly heterosexual appearance but also the scene itself: the ploy, the come-on, even the plumpness of the sofa, everything camera-ready for sex. Violet, however, asks Corky to rely not on looks but on the litmus of sexual response, as if the viscous secretions of the body, tested by fingertip, could inspire some further confidence, or even some outcome less predictable than the one that occurs as Corky’s slippery progression from first to second base is interrupted by the utterly expected arrival of the excluded Caesar.

Rather than curtailing the thematics of sexual trust, Caesar’s entrance merely shifts their terrain from the desirous body to its gendered manifestations. Although the two women quickly resume a quiescent distance and dress, Caesar believes he has disturbed a

cheating Violet. He strides aggressively into the room, only to be brought up short. His angry certainty is rescinded with the revelation that the work-clothed figure in the shadowy apartment is a woman, not a man. Caesar's dawning recognition of Corky's sex serves to restore a chauvinist ignorance in the place previously occupied by a mistaken knowledge: he was right about the scene, when he took her masculine gender at its word. The sting, therefore, is that Caesar is caught out both by judging on appearance and failing to do so, since his first impressions, which simply assigned to Corky a masculinity she thus far inhabits, were more accurate in detecting sexual deceit.

*Bound* continues to transpose the question of heterosexual or homosexual orientation with that of masculine and feminine identification, though in a less than straightforward way. Violet's voluptuous appearance and helpless manner, for instance, signal a passivity that is everywhere belied by her initiations in both the sexual and thriller plots. Corky also plays against type, in bed her Y-fronted masculinity strips down to a sexual receptivity and, in the action sequences, she is patsy to Caesar's more virile intelligence and strength. Judged by diegetic event, not appearance, the thriller plot thus seems to reinforce the lesson Violet had attempted to instil on the make-out couch: handsome is as handsome does, or action overrides image. Butch and femme credentials are given a final shakedown in the action climax when Caesar knocks Corky unconscious a third time, leaving nothing but the money between Violet and himself. Violet holds a handgun on the unarmed Caesar, who stakes his life on knowing Violet better than she knows herself: 'You don't want to shoot me, Vi.' He is wrong, as it happens, and Violet shoots him dead, allowing the film to resolve all its questions about lesbian desire with a finger after all, this one held to the cold steel of a trigger. In *Bound*'s climactic scene, ambivalences that are crucial to the suspense of the film are aggressively closed down in favour of character depth and understanding, and these seemingly cinch tight the case of Violet's sexual loyalty. Caesar is the fall guy here, taking the rap not only for his earlier facile confidence that a fetishized femininity is the inalienable property of heterosexuality, but also for the sexual thriller format itself. Violent though it is, the abstract, designer pulp of Caesar's slow-motion death is oddly lacking in suspense. Where *Bound* elsewhere keeps its audience tautly wired to the intricacies of a plot that seems to invest even the inanimate objects in its vicinity with a capacity for violence and betrayal (telephone, television, porcelain toilet bowl), the final stand-off between Violet and Caesar is strangely hesitant, its outcome supported in the mise-en-scene by nothing other than Violet's character motivation, to which it is sole testimony. They stare at each other across a sea of white paint. Violet pauses long enough to offer Caesar the chance to run, but he would rather cajole, seeing in

her delay an indecision disallowed by the requirements of the plot, which insists on Violet being one thing, not the other

Left to the throes of romance, and without the intercession of the mafia *deus ex machina*, the two women frustrate their own desire. Newly aware that she is not the only one to take up Caesar's place in Violet's bed, Corky, having vacated exactly that spot, deflects Violet's attempt at avowal. The enigmatic, 'I had this image of you inside of me, like a part of me', previously heard as a disembodied voiceover but now sentimentally lodged in Violet's languid figure, meets with a response that suggests Corky's own, less obscure, imagination has been jealously thinking of Violet repeatedly filled by male parts. Sullenly dressing at the bed's edge, Corky's aggression batters down not on her male rivals, Caesar and the unlikely Shelley, but on Violet's doubtful sexuality as neither exclusively heterosexual or homosexual. Sexual compatibility notwithstanding, lesbian desire now becomes a disputed field between the two women. Corky insists that she and Violet are 'different' by the rule that reads sexual availability as identity: having sex with men disqualifies Violet from the ranks of dykes filling the black banquettes of the Watering Hole, the lesbian bar which is Corky's night-time retreat. For Corky, as for Caesar, the name *dyke* operates metonymically, as does her labrys tattoo, as testimony to acts which are signalled even in their representational absence. Violet, despite her earlier come-on, now holds petulantly to the idea that sexual acts alone can neither confirm nor deny orientation, preferring to think of her time under Caesar as 'work'. Violet's five years with Caesar imply a more than temporal parallel with Corky's time inside prison. Her pre-diegetic jailterm locks Corky in with a fleetingly invoked cell-mate who serves her time for 'being caught'.

In the imaginary women's prison, for which *Caged* (John Cromwell, 1950) provides the cinematic model, the lesbian status of sex acts between, say, Corky and this unnamed woman might be compromised by the mandatory homosociality of the institution. That is, Corky too might have been trapped in a situation in which acts strangely fail to secure identities, an implicit support of Violet's rebuke, 'I think we're more alike than you'd care to admit'. Like many other bedroom arguments, this one is less significant for what it says than what it does not. The subject of the dialogue – while crucial to the thriller plot in so far as it verifies that Corky is not altogether sure of Violet's motives and whether or not she is being worked, like the other occupants of Violet's bed, for some pay-off that is more than, and hence not really, sexual – is countered by the scene's affect, which establishes that the more the two women fight and disagree about sexuality, the more they affirm the extent of their mutual desire. This bedside conversation thus complicates the sexual relation between the two women, which is here suspended, providing an erotic rift which delays the satisfaction of the film's romantic narrative.

Perhaps perversely, the homosexual lesson *Bound* administers depends less on romantic complication than the thriller narrative, and its associated set pieces, which take over the sexual plot and its spatial and graphic motifs in order to generate the illusion of a lesbian diegesis. Consider the manner in which Violet and Corky's sexual estrangement is bypassed via the brutal sacrifice of Shelley's little finger in the searingly well-lit bathroom of Violet's apartment. The importance of fingers to regimes of truth-telling has already been established in the first sexual hold between Violet and Corky, but now this connection is violently restated as Mickey calmly declares he will ten times ask the whereabouts of the mob's money, counting off each question with a close of the secateurs around each of the digits on Shelley's hands. Likewise, the sound of this torture scene establishes the adjacency of different spaces, a function previously reserved for sexual noise alone. Heard first by Corky who labours in the neighbouring bathroom, Shelley's terror conveyed through the connecting pipes she works on, the scene also distresses Violet who is linked to the torture via her kitchen blender, whose everyday noise and whirlpool action, visually and aurally linked to the white toilet bowl against which Shelley's head is repeatedly smashed, takes up then dissipates the visceral horror of the events in the room through the wall. Mickey graciously suggests Violet leave the apartment and this precipitates her advent next door, miraculous in so far as it occurs without any establishing shots. Violet simply appears in Corky's apartment, the close coordinates of onscreen space being all that is required to suggest their *rapprochement*. Together they remove to a second – straight – bar where, in the safe enclosure of a white banquette, they discuss for the first time Violet's leaving 'the business' and her plan to steal from the mob. The film's plotline, thoroughly hijacked by the thriller scenario, thus keeps live the question of Violet's loyalty, replaying it as the dangerous necessity for trust among thieves. It is this substitution, the way the film has the thriller plot carry and rework its romantic narrative, that enables the resolution of the earlier question about the sexual difference between Corky and Violet, butch and femme. It is only by detouring this thematic concern through the cinematic format of the thriller that *Bound* can achieve satisfactory romantic closure. The lesbian diegesis remains dependent on the graphic violence of the thriller – and, as I will show, its chromatic design – to secure its sexual outcome.

The hybridization of genres that the sexual thriller instantiates is, perhaps, familiar noir territory, but what seems worthy of comment in the context of a film that has been welcomed as an advance in lesbian representation is the way in which this conflation of genres works at the level of image rather than character. Although *Bound* quickly puts Corky and Violet through their sexual paces in several choreographed seduction scenes, the film's closure is certified as lesbian not by this sexual athleticism – spent within the opening half

hour – nor by the character development it minimally supports, but by the film’s visual style and its repeated distortions of spatial and temporal continuity, most of which are in the service of the thriller format. The romance narrative’s girl-gets-girl outcome, however satisfactory, is utterly reliant on the graphic design of the mise-en-scene and the film’s formal manipulation of editing devices.

Questions of technique have long haunted cinematic representations of homosexuality. The Wachowski brothers’ concern with both sexuality and the conventions of cinematic space comes almost half a century after Hitchcock spliced together formal experimentation and the plot of male perversion in *Rope*. In his formidable discussion of Hitchcock’s film, Miller identifies the deniability of homosexuality as symptomatic of not only the film but also the critical discussion that surrounds it. The example of *Rope* reveals a homophobic hermeneutic that raises the possibility of homosexuality within the film’s story only to deny it. This denial operates on two levels. as an effect of the connotative system of gay signification that the Hollywood production code necessitates and, less predictably, in the critical discourse addressing the film’s formal structure which assumes the homosexual content of the film to be there, though without interest.<sup>5</sup> Hitchcock’s film everywhere maintains the forensic deniability of its homosexual subject. Approved by the Hays Office as nowhere disclosing the presence of sex perversion, *Rope*’s dialogue and mise-en-scene (in particular the way its camera angles suggestively frame male bodies in a too-close proximity that recalls the clench of romance) nonetheless repeatedly work to connote a homosexuality that is nowhere to be found in the film.<sup>6</sup> This second-order invocation of an interdicted topic is signal, not to the failure of the production code but to its peculiar success as a representational order, the enforcing logic of which is to produce homosexuality under a ban. Rather than silence or cancel homosexuality, the code articulates it outside the denotative quarantine of the film’s diegesis. This representational logic kept a stranglehold on homosexuality through three decades of Hollywood film production. The administrative order of code-era films required that sex perversion be compulsorily forbidden, yet always illicitly known.<sup>7</sup>

*Bound*, on the other hand, is evidently interested in the diegetic possibility of lesbianism. That is, it would seem the representational field of *Bound* marks a break with *Rope* in so far as the Wachowskis have the discretionary privilege to make homosexuality their film’s thematic and graphic subject. However, that assumption is in many ways false. It suggests that homosexuality is within the one film and without the other, though held in its magnetic vicinity as its interpretative effect. The tact of Hitchcock’s film, a tact that is more but never less than its upholding of the production code, is that its homosexual meaningfulness is everywhere maintained as an

5 See Miller, *Anal Rope*, pp. 121–3.

6 Ibid., p. 130.

7 Equally suggestive for my thinking about *Bound* are two discussions of Otto Preminger’s *Laura* (1944) which also align the representational problem of homosexual visualization with contestations between narrative and spectacle in classical cinema. See Robert J. Corber, *Resisting the lure of the commodity: Laura and the spectacle of the gay male body in Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1997) pp. 55–78 and Lee Edelman’s *Imagining the homosexual: Laura and the other face of gender* in *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994) pp. 192–241.



ignorance, and the perennial lure of *Rope* is the invitation it extends to viewers to align themselves with this knowledge without ever having to claim it. But *Bound* too reveals homosexuality as an interpretative effect of a representational system, not, of course, the production code, but its Hollywood ally, classical continuity editing. Long after there is any requirement to do so, *Bound* continues, perhaps inevitably, to put cinematic technique in the place of homosexuality. This connection is important to trace because it suggests a continuity in homosexual representation which overrides the historical aegis of the production code and enables the illumination of other, less institutional, mechanisms which discipline the performance of male homosexuality and lesbianism in the field of cinematic representation.

*Bound* repeatedly substitutes graphic meaning in the place of a psychological depth for which it is then mistaken, a cinematic sleight-of-hand for which Hitchcock's thrillers are also known.<sup>8</sup> Familiar from *Rope* as a technical accessory to the production code order that bans direct reference to homosexual content, this same cinematic procedure is detectable in *Bound*'s ostensibly explicit lesbian sex scene, which is most interesting for its refusal of illusionist effect and its blatant recruitment of the camera as sexual prosthetic. Lesbian sex guru Susie Bright's technical consultancy notwithstanding, the sex scene between Gershwin and Tilly suggests that things are, perhaps, much the same as they were in 1948. As we will see, the preliminary holds of this sexual encounter occur in Corky's red utility truck. The vertical wipe to Corky's apartment releases into the new mise-en-scene a mobile camera which describes a 360-degree orbit around two naked bodies on an already familiar mattress. The camera shot begins at floor level before moving higher and closer into the two figures who provide its orienting centre. The camera tracks the length of Violet's body, past her raised shoulder and haunch, before rounding the foot of the bed. A medium closeup captures from low angle the foreshortened length of Corky's torso, her pelvis lifting against Violet's obstetric hand. The orchestration of the scene synchronises the sounds of sex with non-diegetic music, both of which are keyed to the stylized progression of the camera whose circumnavigation of the bed is completed on the attainment of a closeup on Corky's face, Violet's finger inserted between her open lips, a softcore placeholder for that earlier wetted finger pressed to unseen depths. Both actions, sex and camerawork, are satiated in a seventy-second take, which then cuts to a bird's-eye shot looking down on the women, now silent, from high above the bed. If this scene can lay any claim to sexual realism, lesbian or otherwise, it would probably rest on the elasticated sheet riding up the corner of the mattress. Everything else is subservient to the exertion of the 360-degree crane, an apparatus shot that is fully invested in the kinaesthetic possibilities of the agile

8 See for example Mladen Dolar's Hitchcock's objects in Slavoj Žižek (ed.) *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (London and New York: Verso, 1992) pp. 31–46.

camera and almost indifferent to the requirements of character and narrative.

*Bound*'s indebtedness to *Rope* is most succinctly acknowledged in its title and in the length of white rope that is first seen binding Corky's black-booted ankles as she lies, gagged and unconscious, in the darkened recess of Violet's closet. Of this rope's several returns the last is the most resonant: now lying outside the closet it signals not merely Corky's escape and the start of the final suspenseful sequence, but the film's belated attainment of a narrative present for which Hitchcock's film, and its eponymous object, remains the most condensed of tropes. Like its predecessor, *Bound* foregrounds cinema as a spatial system, a filmic organization of place and time which generates among its effects narrative causality and, less straightforwardly, character motivation. If the 'shooting practice' of *Rope* can be said to be animated by 'the dream of a continuous film', that of *Bound* is doubly invested in the potentialities of continuity as they augment a diegesis that is itself already concerned with a diagnostics of homosexuality.<sup>9</sup> Any attempt to specify the location of homosexuality in *Bound* must, therefore, map two allied systems which between them provide the ground for the emergence of lesbianism within the film's representational field, the parameters of which extend beyond its diegesis. The first system involves the editing conventions which stabilize the connection between cinematic space and narrative temporality, and therefore keep the time and place of plot events intelligible to the viewer. The second system is the graphic or pictorial method by which the film couples the romantic or erotic narrative to the suspense thriller, which provides both the driving momentum of the plot and the mechanism for its thematic resolution.

Scene transitions are the most important element in maintaining the hierarchical relations within these spatial and narrative systems. Consider again *Bound*'s opening scene. Constituting the present moment of the thriller storyline, the closet sequence ends with an inaugural fade, a non-diegetically motivated whiteout which cues in the first of the flashback sequences that will comprise most of the film's plot. The tense present moment of the closet will not be attained until late in screen-time, though it will be reprised twice in the interval, once when another non-diegetic whiteout clears to closeups on the fluttering lids and twitching fingers of Corky's bound figure and a second time when, having been jumped by the more powerful Caesar, a subjectively indexed whiteout signals Corky's fall out of consciousness and the fade-in reveals her lying in the same trussed pose described in the opening shot. The visual cues are strong enough to trigger a recognition for the viewer and, in combination with the sound of Caesar's 'Wake up! Wake up!', a false confidence that the flashbacks have achieved the present moment of the film's start. However, immediately a second whiteout,

9 Miller *Anal Rope* p 119

keyed to Corky's coming-to as water is tossed at her face, reveals her to be lying in an open room alongside an equally restrained Violet, about to be interrogated by Caesar who will stash her inside the closet only when he is interrupted by the buzz of the intercom. The film's forward accelerations are potentially disorienting in so far as these shots graphically signal a temporal simultaneity which is then rescinded by the camera's subsequent enlargement of the mise-en-scene which reveals that plot events still lag behind the film's opening. *Bound's* pictorial scheme dominates its narrative in this way, flexibly asserting the ability of the image to override then restore the temporal chronology required to support the logical chains of cause and effect that comprise the film's plot.

In the chromatic design of *Bound*, scene transitions cued by white frequently execute reversals or shifts in chronological sequence, whereas changes in location that are realist in effect, spatially distinct and temporally forward in storytime, are initially cued by red. Consider, for instance, the film's deployment of Corky's red utility. A high-angle shot of Corky, her day's work done, climbing into the red Chevy, establishes an exterior outside the apartment building. The '63 Chevy has previously featured as the subject of a dialogue between Corky and Violet when, alone in apartment 1003, Violet introduces herself and the erotic motifs that will be recycled through the romance and thriller narratives. Accordingly connected with coffee and sex, the cab of the truck can legitimately supply the location in which, once Corky is joined by Violet, the women can resume the sex that Caesar's arrival has earlier cut short. Violet's breathless inquiry, 'Do you have a bed somewhere?' cues a camera movement upwards through the headspace of the Chevy's cab in a shift which disorientingly converts the roof of the truck into the cross-sectioned floor of Corky's stark bedroom, which appears as a dark horizontal line wiping vertically down the frame. The scene transition signals a conventional ellipsis in time and space – Corky's room, like Johnnie's soon-to-be-wrecked lounge, existing at some unspecified distance from the apartment building that Violet and Caesar call home. More manifest is the aesthetic distance between each location, the heterosexual baroque of Johnnie's bachelor pad being more than miles away from the spare interior and rumpled linen that comprise Corky's lesbian minimalism. The scene transition from truck to bedroom is fully integrated with narrative form, the wipe a placeholder for those events we understand to have occurred in an interim that is nowhere represented: the time it takes to drive across town, the time it takes two women to undress.

After sex, the red Chevy transports us just as efficiently back to the original apartment building. A cut moves storytime and place forward to the parking lot where Corky is seen arriving in the red truck, the morning-afterness of the scene reinforced by the non-diegetic soundtrack which fades out on the disclosure onscreen of the

figure of Shelley, clawing at the building's intercom telephone Shelley's first appearance in the vicinity of the red utility is preliminary to the revelation that he too is a lover of Violet's. His subsequent return to the apartment lot is also linked to the red Chevy – however, in the later scene, the erotic quality of the truck, like that of many other things (most memorably plumbing and fingers), is quickly displaced by an association with violence Corky stands on the deck of the truck, as a slow-motion point-of-view pan tracks the arrival of a black limousine out of which three mobsters climb One of them, Johnnie, withdraws a reluctant Shelley from inside the relative safety of the car, then escorts him across the forecourt and back inside the building, delivering him to a violent fate Now a marked man, Shelley is the male figure on whom the substitution between sex and violence is made, just as Caesar's body will later provide the visual counter on which to switch those things back Masculine corporeality, in line with *Bound*'s visual codes, stands in for a feminine carnality harder to represent

Once the mob's torture of Shelley is realized, the film's exploitation of sexual tension will be replaced by a suspense generated in line with the requirements of the thriller, the automotive red now replaced by a wash of blood that will render incarnadine many of the white transitions previously favoured in its plot development Consider the cut from Corky in white undershirt and Y-fronts, lying against a white sheet in her own apartment, to a paintroller whiting out a wall in the apartment she is renovating Corky's pose on the bed, and the camera angle from which it is filmed, is restaged in the later sex scene, her frustrated twanging of a Jew's harp now replaced by Violet's ministrations and the acoustics of sex The temporal expediency of these matches on white are exploited in the opening twenty minutes of the film chiefly to establish the coordinates of the romantic plotline. Once the thriller format takes over, white is stained with red as violence replaces sex as the epistemic nub of the film. The most condensed visual signifier of this transition is that of the white porcelain toilet bowl in apartment 1003 catching droplets of blood and thus becoming its counterpart in the adjacent apartment as the mise-en-scene enlarges to reveal the location of Shelley's torture and his agonised forfeiture of a finger, the fetishized and suitably ungendered body part, which condenses lesbian sex and masculine vulnerability.

Viewers are adept at understanding the causality implied by such graphic devices and the ellipses in time and space these transitions indicate. Together they allow the film's plot sequence (the scenes it depicts for the duration of its screentime, and the order in which they appear) to reference another chronological order of event which we take to be the film's narrative or storyline. Comprised of everything we see and some things we do not, this causal narrative is reconstructed by the viewer who interprets screen events as occurring

in different places and at different times. The most sustained and complicated of these sequences is initiated after a reprise of the bound figure in the closet motif. Corky and Violet are caught in the morning light of Corky's studio apartment. Violet describes the events of the night before, cueing a flashback sequence which picks up events previously suspended as her dialogue takes on the status of voiceover narration. Her account of events is supplemented by the images now screened. Caesar irons banknotes late into the night, standing in an unreal room, a laundry of bills fluttering around him on improvised lines. A question from Corky prompts the screening of events further forward. Caesar at his laptop as an automated machine neatly rebinds the mob's money which he counts into a briefcase. The editing foregrounds Corky's reliance on Violet's version of events and restates the issue of trust. However, a subsequent return to Violet and Corky enables a change in narration. Corky, still at the window of her one-room apartment, interrogates Violet for more information, before starting to plan the heist out loud as the image track proceeds to run ahead of the moment of speech and anticipates the events her dialogue describes. The flashforward sequence, which reveals the decoy ploy Violet will enact in order to allow Corky to enter her and Caesar's apartment and take the money, twice returns to the scene in Corky's studio (once to reveal Corky pulling a pearl-handled revolver from beneath her mattress as she counsels Violet, 'Trust me'), and continues to orient itself to the moment of planning until the point where Caesar opens the briefcase to find it full of newsprint. An extreme low-angle shot of Caesar's face tilts and slows his irregular movements against a stable background. The jerky out-of-focus effect, understood as a visual index to his nauseated state, also provides a formal dislocation sufficient to terminate the flashforward sequence. Corky is revealed in the next door apartment, the money beside her, as screen events now mark the suspenseful coincidence of time and space, although these events are still prior to the opening scene of the film. Within an overall though unreliable flashback structure, *Bound's* technologies of narration and editing move events both ways, reversing and advancing its image track in order to assemble the more compelling plot. Flashbacks and establishing shots are the conventional means film employs to register these spatial and temporal shifts while tracing the causal connections that will retrospectively comprise the coherent story. *Bound*, however, deploys a further series of graphic devices (fades, wipes, visual matches in the mise-en-scene) which also cue spatial and temporal shifts, but which work against this accruing sense of a coherent storytime and storyspace embedded in, though independent of, the film's plot. Even as it unfolds a tightly-wound, causally-linked thriller narrative, *Bound* includes moments of formal discontinuity which, far from rescinding the more realist claims of its romance plot, actually secure them.

The film's first whiteout functions in a conventional manner, taking us forward in screentime but backward in storytime to present events which precede Corky's confinement in the closet of the opening shot. The fade-in reveals Corky standing within a deep red interior as a highly distinctive offscreen voice we recognize as one of the non-diegetic voices heard over the earlier scene exhales, 'Hold the elevator,' which might be 'Happy Birthday, Mr President' for all the wheezy affect Jennifer Tilly breathes into Violet's voice. The comparison with Marilyn Monroe suggests the vacancy of the acting style the Wachowskis draw from their cast, a style which allows the critical butch and femme difference of the female leads to lodge in nothing more than Tilly's voice and Gershon's pout. The shots which follow establish other coordinates of character and space, though less efficiently. Caesar looks towards the front of the elevator, his back towards the two women. Behind him, as it were, a shot/counter-shot sequence registers a slow exchange of looks between Violet and Corky of which he is unaware. Held in a high-angle shot, the three figures in the lift form a conspicuous triangle, the padded shoulders of Caesar's open overcoat providing a clear apex to the more graphically similar points marked by Corky and Violet's black leather jackets. As Caesar and Violet leave the elevator, we see Corky tilt her head, sideways and down, preliminary to a slow-motion tracking shot on Violet's legs as they move the length of the hallway. The sleazy camera shot, now marked as Corky's gaze, has its alibi in character motivation. Such point-of-view shots are, however, infrequent in *Bound* and the more signature camera set-up is the one which halts Violet's slow walk before a distant apartment doorway (perhaps 1001) some way beyond an exactly similar one in the foreground which Corky will likewise and simultaneously enter (1003). The establishment of the spatial adjacency of the two apartments is no less important to the film's plot than the suggestion of sexual interest between the two women. Prior to the distraction of any onscreen dialogue, the film implicitly links the possibility of same-sex sex with our perception of the synchronicity of cinematic space and time.

An undisguised cut takes us into apartment 1003. A low-level camera runs the length of some buckets on the floor before rising on Corky in the middle of an empty room. Now stripped of her leather jacket, she stands before a patterned red background, talking into a heavy black telephone. Distracted, she swivels around to listen to the more muffled noises coming from behind a wall whose red paper is now seen in detail. The mobile camera then moves through the space between the figure of Corky and the red background she appears against, carving out a depth which is foreclosed once the flat of the wall has been achieved as the exclusive focus of the frame. The sound cues signal depth and distance but also establish that the wall is paper thin, permeable to noises such as the banging bedhead and

male panting that Corky and the viewer currently hear from the as yet unseen bedroom of apartment 1003. The red wallpaper pattern will retain this aural link with heterosexual expenditure, and will be used again to mark the odd contiguity of the two spaces, communicating rooms as it were. These elements of the *mise-en-scène*, like the one-sided phone conversation that simultaneously explains Corky's presence in the building and suggests the complexities of her past, are fully integrated with the narrative form of the film, defining a coherent storyworld in which plot events can logically occur. The unambiguous delineation of the space of the scene focuses our attention on the information which is crucial to the chain of cause and effect which underwrites both action and character. In this hierarchy, cinematic space defers to narrative, providing the realist backdrop against which motivation can emerge.

In its first appearance, the red wall thus supports the cinematic illusion that apartments 1001 and 1003 are spatially distinct, neighbouring each other in the imagined blueprint of the apartment building which also locates them on a tenth floor, attainable by lift and, as is later necessary to the plot, a vertiginous stairwell. But while the maintenance of this illusion is crucial to the development of the thriller plot (as is the suggestion that sound travels between the two apartments) the film will also include transition shots which dispel the integrity of three-dimensional space by playing against the audience's expectations concerning offscreen space. Consider the next deployment of the red wall motif which occurs after Corky and Violet have had sex. The red Chevy having synchronized the arrival of Corky and Shelley at Violet's apartment building, both ascend to the top floor where Corky and Shelley enter the adjacent apartments in time, as Corky and Violet have earlier done. As in the previous sequence, Corky steps through the white door into the offscreen space of the apartment undergoing renovation. A cut occurs on the white door before the frame is once again filled with the familiar red patterned wallpaper. As before, the smothered sound of panting permeates the red wall. The noise of sex continues to be heard, gaining then falling away in intensity to be succeeded by a female voice whose equally breathy utterance bridges a visual cut from the abstract red pattern to a head and shoulders closeup of Violet, still talking, lying in a bed which abuts what we assume to be the other side of the three-dimensional wall. This 180-degree turnaround is confirmed as the camera pulls back from the bare-shouldered woman to reveal another figure dressing at the bed's edge. The new *mise-en-scène* is consistent with the sound cues which, having fallen away, lead us to expect the conversational aftermath of sex. However, the dark-haired figure who buttons up furtively at the left of the frame is not the anticipated Shelley but Corky, whom the camera had apparently left in the offscreen space of the other apartment. The unexpected quality of the scene transition, spatially continuous but

temporally elliptical is, we might note, compatible with the order of cuts so far established on white or red which denote temporal discontinuities (advances and reversals) in order to facilitate the compression of storytime to plot-time and screen duration.

Indeed, Corky has a way of turning up unexpectedly in onscreen space. After Violet first floats her plan of stealing from the mob, Corky's response, 'I want to see the money', provides an acoustic bridge across a visual cut away from the interior of the Chevy into Violet's apartment. The mobile camera rapidly approaches the red walls of the vestibule, meeting Caesar head-on as he rushes through the door, his white shirt front soaked in Shelley's blood, and across the room to spill the equally stained money into the kitchen sink for the first stage of its literal laundering. Caesar will shortly exit the kitchen, walking to the left and out of frame, leaving Violet standing at the bench looking down on the bloodstained money, as Corky has earlier stood over a sink rinsing white paint through her fingers after their first sexual encounter. Once again, red replaces white, as violence replaces sex. Unannounced, Corky angles into the *mise-en-scène* from the left and silently takes up a position at Violet's shoulder before a whiteout returns her to the temporally unanchored closet. Such chromatic switches will be increasingly associated with not sex but violence, though they finally provide the terms through which the sexual thematic will be resolved.

The substitution of figures, our discovery of Corky having vacated the position, on top of Violet, we assume to be Shelley's, or the cinematic balance of her arrival in a frame following Caesar's departure, cinches together the film's two narratives, erotic and thriller, establishing that the question of Violet's trustworthiness is indexed to two equally paranoid structures, those of sexual orientation and organized crime. Violet's bisexual capacities notwithstanding, the important information conveyed by Shelley's initial advent in the diegesis is not that Violet is cheating on Corky, but that she is cheating on Caesar with someone inside 'the business'. It is Shelley's insider status, not his gender or putative heterosexuality, that the film exploits. Similarly, the plot of the film is driven by Caesar's brilliant attempts to outstrip criminal knowledges and effectively terminated when the situation calls on him to second-guess Violet's sexuality. In his final scene, at the end of his rope, adrift in the synchronic time that Corky's slipping hers sets ticking, Caesar makes a call in his own favour, judging Violet reluctant to kill him. 'Caesar', warns Violet, 'you don't know shit', before confirming his fatal error. Felled by bullets perforating with red the familiar contours of his white shirtfront, Caesar's mortal arc provides the graphic link *Bound* requires to close down the question of lesbian desire: his body lies in a pool of white paint now washed with a sanguinary tint. Caesar's end is purely cinematic, the bird's-eye camera frames him spreadeagled, bleeding red into a white.



background. In a final confidence trick, the film offers his splayed and punctured form as visual testimony to that which it could otherwise never establish: Violet's secret and sexualized integrity, the inalienability of her lesbianism.

A non-diegetic whiteout over Caesar's dead body fades to an all-white apartment, an empty closet standing open in a rear corner. There are no other coordinates for reading this space, which could be consequently either apartment 1001 or 1003. An undisguised cut presents Violet and Mickey, the surviving mobster who is charged with hunting down the disappeared Caesar in whose possession the mob's money is assumed to be, standing beside a black car. Plot ends neatly tied off, the family limousine can then be replaced by Corky's new red Chevy. Opened by remote control, the late-model truck allows Corky and Violet, with two million dollars in hand, to climb into the cab and drive out of the retroworld of the film's diegesis and into some other, temporally unbound space where the difference between butch and femme is no difference at all. Corky, windscreen reflections falling across her face, turns to Violet and asks, 'You know the difference between you and me?' The question is doubly disingenuous. Corky and Violet are dressed as they were in the opening elevator scene but, now cropped in medium closeup, their black leather jackets and wayfarers register only their sexual similarity. 'No', says Violet. 'Me neither', replies Corky, before the dark undercarriage of the truck passes over the low-level camera, inaugurating a blackout upon which final credits scroll, there being nothing left to say. The dialogue suggests that the erotic misunderstandings of that earlier bedside argument, which foundered on the homosexual/heterosexual difference between Corky and Violet, have been addressed and resolved; as if the question of Violet's sexual allegiance, whether she goes with men or women, were answered by homicide, by the chill expedient of having her wipe out Caesar. His pulpy, slowmotion death stands as a displaced yet unequivocal testimony to lesbian desire.<sup>10</sup> The same-sex coordinates

<sup>10</sup> The equation assumed between homosexuality and homicide recalls not only *Rope* but far less classical precedents such as *Black Widow* (Bob Rafelson, 1986), *Single White Female* (Barbet Schroeder, 1992) and *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992). For an attempt to theorize this tendency to depict lesbianism as a violence against men see Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (London: Routledge, 1994).

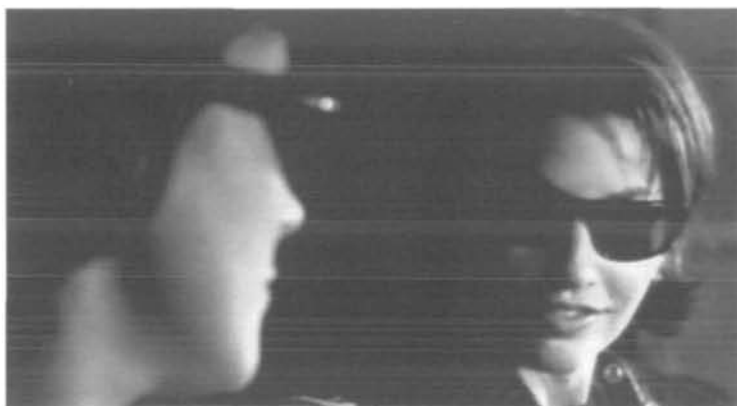
The cinematic ending of *Caesar* (Joe Pantoliano).



of the film's closure are enabled, not simply by Caesar's removal from the plot, but by the spectacularity of that withdrawal. Violet's sexual obscurity is resolved, not by the disclosure of sexual clench or romantic commitment, but by the visual device of mixing white and red.

Cinematic suspense has always exploited this capacity of viewers to see what is not there, but the innovation of *Bound* may well be to suggest that something like this capacity is at play in our most casual understandings of sexual difference: sexuality, or at least its demarcation as heterosexual or homosexual, is arbitrary, a scam or confidence trick that involves a knowledge augmented by ignorance. Just as the realist space of cinematic action is an illusion generated by the conventions of continuity editing, so, perhaps, is sexuality a character effect elicited by the apparatus of the camera and its manipulation of the mise-en-scene. The lesbianism of *Bound*'s characters, like other elements in the mise-en-scene (phones, furniture, floorplans), is foremost and finally a function of the plot. Like *Rope*, *Bound* taps into the double valencies of the sexual thriller. Though separated by five decades and the apparent remission of the production code, in both films the criminal storyline carries the erotic narrative, disguising and supplementing the insufficiencies of its homosexual diegesis. In *Bound*, the proof of lesbianism is cinematically conveyed, not by the choreographed sex scenes which occur within the first twenty minutes of screentime, but by the graphic violence associated with the mafia sting. The thriller plot and its associated technical devices generate the impression of character motivation and depth which the romantic plotline, with its reliance on dialogue and a more restricted visual economy of dress and undress, could never establish unaided. In this way *Bound* inevitably recalls, and inverts, the representational effect Miller discerns in *Rope*: its narrative approaches the subject of lesbianism head-on, yet the film's means of securing homosexual closure is formally oblique, marked less by avowal and disclosure than pictorial displacement and

'You know the difference  
between you and me?' -  
*Bound*'s final scene.



excess. The critical effect of watching *Bound* is not unlike that generated, more homophobically, in the wake of *Rope*. That is, we are convinced we see what is nowhere in evidence. The cinematic sleight goes unnoticed, perhaps, because of our viewerly investments in narrative outcome and closure. We can be relied on to see what we want. *Bound's* lesbianism is generated in the vicinity of the diegesis as an effect of the film's system of spatial and temporal editing. Violet's sexuality, like Corky's, is cinematic.

# From Nazi whore to good German mother: revisiting resistance in the Holocaust film

JULIA ERHART

<sup>1</sup> Yet cinematic efforts to make sense of German participation date back much farther to *The Murderers are Among Us* (Wolfgang Staudte 1946)

<sup>2</sup> The matter of women's participation in contemporary German cinema has received considerable attention. See Julia Knight, *Women and the New German Cinema* (London: Verso, 1992); Barbara Kosta *Recasting Autobiography: Women's Counterfictions in Contemporary German Literature and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Susan E. Linville, *Feminism, Film, Fascism: Women's Auto/Biographical Film in Postwar Germany* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998); Richard W. McCormick, *Politics of the Self: Feminism and the Postmodern in West German Literature and Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Renate Mühlmann, *Die Frau mit der Kamera: Filmemacherinnen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Situation, Perspektiven, 10 exemplarische Lebensläufe*

The debate over how best to represent the past as well as the difficulties involved in doing so has animated countless German film projects since the 1962 Oberhausen manifesto.<sup>1</sup> Some of these, such as *Germany, Pale Mother* (Helma Sanders-Brahms, 1980), *Peppermint Peace* (Marianne Rosenbaum, 1982), and *The Hunger Years* (Jutta Bruckner, 1979), have focused on women's experiences, showing how women simultaneously were agents within and victims of the ideologies and practices of National Socialism and its immediate historical aftermath.<sup>2</sup> While such work has productively broadened the terms of the discussion and interrupted the masculinist tenor of the dialogue, it has tended to identify the heterosexually-oriented family as the single most important determinant of women's lives. In this essay I want to explore the new questions which emerge when the past is shown from the point of view of two lesbian characters. Although much has been written about 'the lesbian' in cinema, little has been written about the cultural function of that figure within specific national cinemas, or within films about actual historical events.<sup>3</sup> What new pressures are brought to bear on notions such as resistance and collaboration when performed by lesbian characters? What changes does the Holocaust film undergo when imaged through the generic parameters of the lesbian love story?

Until recently there existed only one production from Germany or elsewhere that dealt with the issue of the Holocaust from a lesbian

(Munich: Carl Hanser, 1980). Ingeborg Majer, O'Sickey and Ingeborg von Zadow (eds) *Triangulated Visions: Women in Recent German Cinema* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998). Gabriele Weinberger, *Nazi Germany and its Aftermath in Women Directors' Autobiographical Films of the Late 1970s in the Murderer's House* (San Francisco, CA: Mellon Research University Press, 1992).

- 3 Exceptions would be anthologies such as Stephen Bourne, *Brief Encounters: Lesbians and Gays in British Cinema, 1930–1971* (London: Cassell, 1996) and Keith Howes, *Broadcasting it: an Encyclopedia of Homosexuality on Film, Radio and TV in the UK 1923–1993* (London: Cassell, 1993). The issue of gay male representation within national cinemas has received more thorough consideration. See for instance essays in Paul Julian Smith, *Laws of Desire: Questions of Homosexuality in Spanish Writing and Film 1960–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Chris Berry, *A Bit on the Side: East-West Topographies of Desire* (Sydney: Empress Publications, 1994). Owen Heathcote (ed.), *Gay Signatures: Gay and Lesbian Theory, Fiction and Film in France, 1945–1995* (Berg: Oxford, 1998).
- 4 Heiko Rosner, 'Review of *November Moon*', *Film-echo: Filmwoche* 4, vol. 5, no. 24 (January 1986), p. 27.
- 5 Although reviews of the film were mixed, one aspect that was well received, even by people who did not especially like the film, was the representation of the ambivalence of life under Occupation. See Marli Feldvoß, 'Novembermond', *EPD Film* vol. 3, no. 2 (February 1986), p. 31. Margret Köhler, 'Filme von Frauen', *Medien* vol. 29, no. 2 (1985), pp. 76–82. Rosner, 'Review of *November Moon*', Two supporting characters in particular stood out – one of whom was the collaborator Marcel (see Feldvoß, 'Novembermond', Köhler, 'Filme von Frauen').

perspective. A French–German coproduction whose release was timed to coincide with the forty-year anniversary of the end of the war,<sup>4</sup> *November Moon* (Alexandra von Grote, 1985) is formally a relatively straightforward period drama. The film is about two women, a Frenchwoman and a German Jewish expatriate, who meet and fall in love in Paris before the war. Once war breaks out, the women flee the city to the unoccupied zone in the south, where November, the Jewish woman, is captured by the SS, raped, and sent to work in a brothel. With the help of a sympathetic German officer, who later on in the film is executed for having assisted her, she manages to escape from the brothel and make her way back to Paris and to her lover, Ferial. The events that take place following November's return to Paris are, to my mind, what distinguish the film as a specifically feminist and lesbian interpretation of the Occupation. In Paris, while November remains in hiding in the small apartment, rations grow thin and an anxious Ferial soon realizes that a strategy must be devised to deflect attention from the fact that she is concealing a Jewish refugee. As November practises crouching in a hiding place under the couch, Ferial resourcefully resumes a friendship with the film's most complex supporting character, a collaborator named Marcel.<sup>5</sup> Agreeing to become his paramour as well as secretary at the pro-fascist newspaper where he works, Ferial effectively remakes herself overnight as a Nazi sympathizer and as heterosexual. In so far as the two women are not found out, the ruse is more or less successful, at least until the end of the war, when Ferial is denounced and punished by her nationalist French neighbours who of course know nothing of her Jewish woman lover. In the very last scene of the film, in what would otherwise be a celebratory moment, Ferial is dragged from her home, where she is drinking champagne with her lover, to a city square. There her head is shaved and she is assaulted with insults of 'Nazi whore' and 'Nazi slut'.

As a feminist film, *November Moon* is clearly invested in disrupting the opposition between public history (stereotypically considered to be important solely to men) and private stories (thought significant mostly to women). Eschewing large-scale depictions of great, historical events – France's entry into the war, the commencement of the Occupation; the arrival of the Allies in Normandy, and so on – the film renders such occurrences as fragments of information that are exchanged principally between the women characters. Though the movie includes one shot of fighting at the front, it is so brief in duration (fifteen seconds) and so decontextualized from neighbouring scenes that it appears out of place. As my summary of the film's plot should show, von Grote's central aim is to re-cast the issue of collaboration from a feminist and, moreover, anti-homophobic point of view – that is, in a way that acknowledges the existence of historical lesbian relationships. In doing so, the film works to counter *a posteriori* the accusations that

historically were levied at women who had engaged in (or who it was thought, had engaged in) relations with occupying officers or soldiers. The clandestine relationship between Fénial and her lover is an exemplar of but one of the 'unseen' components of women's experience that, hypothetically, would have justified cooperation with the occupying forces. As such, the representation of that relationship is a polemic aimed at those who would, or did, pass judgment because of hearsay or gossip, asking them retrospectively to reflect on the certainty of their perceptions. At the same time, given that the relationship is a lesbian one, it is also a corrective to a historically located homophobia that prohibited the 'seeing' of non-heterosexual romantic liaisons. In the film's logic, the non-seeing of lesbianism is what the fascists do: to 'not see' is at the very least to produce a view of political activism that is inaccurate, if not actually reactionary. The final shot of the film, a closeup of November in the city square trying to comfort her battered lover, is an indication of the inadequacy of November's presence within the frame, and indeed within the story, to counter the violence. In an attempt to right the historical record, the film challenges society's double standard that acknowledges some forms of presence but not others.

A 1997 BBC documentary rehearses many of the issues raised in von Grote's film, in a nonfictional context. Based on a book, *Aimee and Jaguar*, published in 1994 by the German feminist writer Erica Fischer, *Love Story* (d. Catrine Clay) is about a real relationship that occurred between two women in wartime Berlin. Like the couple in *November Moon*, Felice Schragenheim and Lilly Wust stand at polar ends of the political and ethnic spectrum: Felice was a Jewish lesbian who was active in the German underground and who stayed alive by passing as a non-Jew, while Lilly, mother of four boys and 1942 recipient of the Maternal Cross for exemplary mothering, was the wife of a German officer and, by some people's accounts, the ideal Nazi mother. Although she separated herself from her husband's politics and ultimately threw her unqualified support behind her lover – divorcing her husband and helping Felice in her political work – Lilly was initially feared by many of Felice's friends, who suspected her of upholding fascist ideals. I shall discuss these issues in some detail later, but for the moment, it is sufficient to say that while the concerns of Felice's friends eventually proved unfounded, the political and cultural differences between the women were strategic for Felice: by her own devising and on the advice of several friends, Felice decided to live with Lilly in part because she thought that no-one would ever suspect a recipient of the Maternal Cross to be harbouring a Jew.

Like *November Moon*, the 1997 documentary complicates and amplifies conventional categories of realist historical storytelling, such as heroism, humanitarianism, courageousness, and so on, rather than simply showing women performing tasks that men have

typically been shown to do. Like the feature film, the documentary aligns political or ethical correctness with homosexuality, retroactively expanding the scope of the former by associating it with the latter. In the logic of the two films, 'fascist' and 'homosexual' are mutually exclusive identities, an idea that departs significantly from what is seen earlier in art films such as *The Conformist* (Bernardo Bertolucci, Italy/France/West Germany, 1970) but which emerges in other feminist films of the decade, such as Liliana Cavani's *The Berlin Affair* (Italy, 1985) and Karoly Makk's *Another Way* (Hungary, 1982). Both films critique conventional understandings of resistance, which, at least in the case of France, have typically functioned to foreclose upon the construction of women as worthy social actors and have distracted national interest from the fact of French collaboration.<sup>6</sup> Although *November Moon* features a minor character who is a member of the French Resistance (Férial's brother), there is not a single scene of him in that context, overall, the film does not seem especially interested in either him or his work. While there is no shortage of feature films about the Resistance, including at least one which depicts women Resistance fighters (*Blanche et Marie* [Jacques Renard, France, 1985]) and one which deconstructs the achievements of the Resistance (*Armée des ombres* [Jean-Pierre Melville, France, 1969]), to my knowledge there have not yet been any that have achieved this from a feminist point of view.<sup>7</sup>

What distinguishes both *November Moon* and *Love Story* is precisely such a perspective, that is, a criticism of the differential logic which recognizes and validates certain forms of resistance over others. For example, while *November Moon*'s male collaborator, Marcel, aims to cross the border into Germany once the Allies arrive, that option is not open to the female character, Férial. In this film, the mapping of political treachery on to sexual licentiousness via the term 'Nazi whore' is a product of the same inequity that allows Marcel to make a midnight-hour escape while Férial is roundly humiliated. And, although the progressive-thinking Férial is as disgusted by the Nazis as is her Resistance fighter brother, he alone is able to vent his outrage through the masculinist and socially-sanctioned mode of voluntary conscription. Though *Love Story* makes this point implicitly rather than explicitly, resistance here is likewise principally an act carried out by women in a world that is predominantly homosocial. Only one of the five major characters of the story, Gerd Ehrlich, is male, and not one of the key women characters, who include Ulla Schaaf and Eleni Predski-Kramer in addition to Lilly and Felice, is visibly linked to a male partner. Like *November Moon*, *Love Story* considerably broadens the definition of resistance, including everything from the theft of identification cards to Felice's passing as a non-Jew to the very act of 'reckless living' carried out by both Felice and Lilly.

<sup>6</sup> That the first Frenchman was not convicted of crimes against humanity until April of 1994 would seem to be an indication of the national reluctance to acknowledge pro-Nazi activity. Cf. Serge Klarsfeld, *Slaughter of the innocents* (New York Times 25 January 1995, p. A19).

<sup>7</sup> Although overall there exist fewer films about German or German-language resistance movements than about movements in other countries, interestingly there are at least two feminist films about efforts in Germany and Austria respectively: *Five Last Days* (Percy Adlon, 1982) focuses on the five days prior to the execution of Sophie Scholl, one of the leaders of the student-led anti-government groups *The White Rose*; *A Minute of Darkness Does Not Blind Us* (Susanne Zanke, 1986) is based on the life and memoirs of the Austrian resister Grete Schutte-Lihotzky.

Although *Love Story* does not centre on the issue of collaboration in the same way as *November Moon*, it highlights related acts of duplicity and masquerade, showing both to be important to the women's survival.<sup>8</sup> Central to the narratives of both films is a cross-ethnic relationship in which the Jewish woman is protected by the actions of her lover, which appear to be one thing (pro-fascist) but in fact are resolutely the opposite. That each of the non-Jewish leading characters, Ferial and Lilly, functions as two things at once – lover and protector of a persecuted subject, what Alison Owings would call a 'righteous gentile',<sup>9</sup> and secretary at a pro-Nazi paper in Ferial's case, or model Nazi mother in Lilly's – raises issues at the heart of Holocaust studies: what counts as resistance, what counts as collaboration, are there 'rules' to resistance and is there only one right way to act, in Abigail Rosenthal's words, an 'appropriate way to undergo one's Holocaust'?<sup>10</sup>

At one end of the continuum is the view, authored by Hannah Arendt and developed by Raul Hilberg, that only those actions that directly stemmed or stayed the Nazi advance constitute resistance – such as, for example, that of the woman prisoner who grabbed the SS officer's gun and shot him, even though it cost her her own life, or the work of underground organizations.<sup>11</sup> At the other end are those such as survivor Terence Des Pres, who argues that, within the camps or ghettos, the act of surviving itself qualifies as resistance, regardless of how the survivor did or did not cooperate. Roger Gottlieb's definition embraces those of both Hilberg and Des Pres, in that resistance reflects the situational difference that varies from one context to another.<sup>12</sup> For Gottlieb, resistance is a relational concept that is determined according to the circumstances in which the persecuted subject finds him or herself.<sup>13</sup> In other words, if it is the religious aspect of identity that is deemed offensive, then public prayer, regardless of the outcome, would qualify as resistance. If it is physical survival, then escape by any means necessary would count. As the principle threat in both films is that of discovery, in Gottlieb's definition the act of remaining disguised (in *Love Story*) or hidden (in *November Moon*) would qualify as resistance.

Above all, what emerges in both films is an idea of resistance that pivots upon the sexual enacted principally by women, each act is facilitated by a character's successful apprehension and flaunting of the codes of normative femininity. From Ferial's performance of a Nazi-sympathizer to Felice's construction of herself as a non-Jew, to Lilly's appearance as the quintessential Nazi mother – not one of the women is precisely what she appears to be. As I have suggested, in both films survival is achieved by the dissemination of the suggestion that the non-Jewish women are other than they are. In both, the success of political mimicry is contingent upon their masquerade of sexuality that Germans and collaborationist French do not question. Only by imitating the conventions of heterosexuality is Ferial

8 Seen through the eyes of her unknowing French neighbours Ferial's apparent fall from outspoken antagonist of fascism to 'Nazi whore' would function in Dominick LaCapra's words 'transferentially for contemporary subjects for whom guilt and atonement are pressing issues. See 'Representing the Holocaust: reflections on the historians' debate' in Saul Friedlander (ed.) *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 108–27. On this question see also Eric L. Santner 'History beyond the pleasure principle' in Friedlander, *Probing the Limits*, pp. 143–54.

9 Alison Owings *Frauen: Women Recall the Third Reich* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p. 432.

10 Abigail Rosenthal 'The right way to act: indicting the victims' in Roger S. Gottlieb (ed.) *Thinking the Unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 138.

11 Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Allen, 1962).

12 Terence Des Pres 'Us and them', in Gottlieb (ed.), *Thinking the Unthinkable*, pp. 109–25.

13 Rober S. Gottlieb 'The concept of resistance: Jewish resistance during the Holocaust', in Gottlieb (ed.) *Thinking the Unthinkable*, p. 329.



credible as a Nazi-sympathizer, it is largely because of her status as a 'good German (Nazi) mother' that Lilly's activism can remain undetected. The mimicry of normative sex/gender relations that would appear purely capitulative, is paradoxically what makes oppositional activity possible.

For Homi Bhabha, mimicry is a form of fetishism enacted by the colonized against the colonizer that helps mediate the disempowering and expropriative effects of colonization. Represented in both the stereotype and in the anglicized-but-not-English colonial subject, mimicry involves the apprehension of the cultural codes of the colonizer, including dress, manners and language, by the colonized subject.<sup>14</sup> What Edward Said would call a median category that emerges from colonial discourse,<sup>15</sup> mimicry both controls a perceived threat to the established order and has the transformative effect of changing the look of colonial surveillance into the distanced and 'displacing gaze of the disciplined'.<sup>16</sup> An agonistic attitude that allows for different forms of agency than earlier metaphors of domination, mimicry produces the colonized as a presence rather than as the purely negative or repressed double of the colonizer.<sup>17</sup>

Although the racial, industrial and other differences between the colonial territories, about which Bhabha writes, and Europe in the 1940s might seem to invalidate my invocation of him in this context, there are structural commonalities between his map and the territories I am describing that are helpful to my thinking about the strategies available. In *Love Story*, reference is repeatedly made to the contradiction between the apparently fascist and anti-fascist components of Lilly's personality. Although in 1981 she was awarded the Federal Service Cross for her wartime anti-fascism, surviving acquaintances recall her uttering anti-semitic remarks, and testify to the existence in the living room of her home of a bronze relief of Hitler. In talking-head footage with the film's director, Lilly Wust not surprisingly denies such charges, blaming her reputation on the fact that she was married to a German officer. While acknowledging people's contradictory memories of her, the voice of the film comes down firmly on the side of Lilly's anti-fascism, undercutting negative references to her politics by naming her the 'supposed Nazi' and ending with the unequivocal statement that 'the woman once suspected of being a Nazi, turned out to be the very opposite'.

My point here is not to pass judgment on the details of Lilly's wartime politics, but to demonstrate how they function in the world of the historical story. Regardless of 'what' Lilly 'was', the suspicions about her politics prove strategic, for Felice and for herself as Felice's safeguard. Talking-head footage from a friend, Ulla, directly links Lilly's reputation to the safety Felice enjoyed. Estimating the reasons Felice trusted she would be safe at Lilly's house, she states, 'Lilly was known as a bit of a Nazi. No-one would

<sup>14</sup> Homi Bhabha *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 89.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 88.

suspect her of hiding a Jew. So Felice moved in and stayed.' The significance of Lilly's doubled identity – her being 'a bit of' a Nazi – is further evident in a description of Lilly's grilling by the Gestapo, during which she denied knowing Felice was Jewish. As the camera lingers on a photograph of Lilly with her young boys, the voiceover relates that the Gestapo believed her, 'because they couldn't imagine that a good German mother with four fine sons would harbour a Jew.'

The two-sidedness that characterizes Lilly's identity also characterizes the women's demeanour as a couple. While the film informs us of their awareness of the danger they were both constantly in, it also relates how they travelled confidently around the city, visiting friends in cafes, cycling around, going everywhere together, in short, conducting themselves, as a friend Elenai describes it, 'as though there were no danger'. Although under other circumstances reports of such conduct would bring viewers pleasure, because viewers imagine the risks involved, Elenai's narration induces apprehension. Lilly's description of how she and Felice took particular pleasure from going to the hotel across from Hitler's headquarters, the Kaiserhof, has more or less this effect. 'It was bursting with SS uniforms!' she says, almost triumphantly, in a way that leaves viewers cringing. What is finally apparent from Ulla's, Elenai's, and Lilly's testimonies is a split in Lilly's identity and in the couple's actions that, on the one hand, expresses extraordinary vulnerability and, on the other, exudes confidence and authority – in short, proper Aryan Germanness.

The trope of two-sidedness is also apparent in *November Moon*, in which each intercultural exchange has two contradictory meanings, an obvious or capitulative one for the occupying forces, and a coded or oppositional signification for the French and the Jews. In each



Ferial (Christiane Millet) and November (Gabriele Osberg) in a cafe before the war. Picture courtesy: BFI Stills.

case, the (in)ability to see the 'code' or covert meaning turns upon the reader's dependence on the stereotype in his or her interpretive process. While November and viewers are aware that Férial's acceptance of the job at the pro-fascist paper is intended to divert attention from her household, Marcel and his German colleagues are blinded by her coquettish manner, unable to see beyond the masquerade of heterosexuality that she performs. A scene in which Férial appears to dance for the benefit of the Nazis and their French collaborationist friends demonstrates the doubled significance of her actions, that is only partially legible by the Germans but fully visible to viewers. On the night before the Nazi defeat, Férial accompanies Marcel and some of his friends to a bar. Not responding to the men's overt interest in her, Férial dances, not with them, but alone, by herself, in the middle of the room. Whereas the bar patrons read the dreamy, exuberant smile on her face as evidence of heterosexual, narcissistic pleasure in being looked at, viewers recall an earlier lesbian scene in the movie, where before the war Férial and November danced together in a café in front of an initially indifferent but ultimately irate Parisian audience – a scene which concluded with the women's hasty departure from the establishment. Because the film's viewers remember the earlier dancing scene, they know that Férial's thoughts are indeed not with the Nazi onlookers in this latter scene, but with her lover who waits for her, with whom she will celebrate later that night. Because of stylistic commonalities between the two dancing scenes – such as muted lighting, a relay of closeups on the café patrons' faces, the dancer(s)' expressions of enjoyment and their patent disregard for the patrons' stares – the analogy between the first homophobic set of viewers and this second fascist set could not be clearer. In both scenes, the implication is that there is a good deal more going on in the heads of the dancers or dancer than the other patrons are able to grasp. The first dancing scene marks the beginning of a lesbian love affair, whose existence patrons either do not see or cannot comprehend, while the second scene coincides with the arrival of the Allies in Normandy – the consequences of which are comprehensible to Férial, but not to the Nazis. Especially in the latter scene, there is considerably more power in being looked at than the classical understanding of the voyeurism has led us to expect<sup>18</sup> precisely by not returning the invasive gazes of the onlookers, Férial is able to maintain her doubled status, to remain unavailable to the bar patrons.

The scene in which the Gestapo search Férial's apartment likewise manifests a doubled complex of meanings. Key to the working of the scene is the preceding one in which Férial, tipped off about the search, hurriedly helps November to leave the apartment and spend the night elsewhere. When the Gestapo finally appear, viewers, who know what is at stake but also that the object of the search has flown the proverbial coop, perceive Férial's feigned nonchalance to

18 I refer here to the initial characterization of cinematic visual pleasure/labour as unexceptionally oppressive to women. The canonical text is Laura Mulvey's 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' *Screen* vol. 16 no. 3 (1975) pp. 6–18.

be highly ironic. While her petulance about cooperating can pass as the legitimate outrage of someone with her 'connections' being the subject of a search, viewers have a different opinion. Férial's reluctance to carry out the officer's demand to disclose the contents of November's (by now empty) hiding place under the couch seems to ridicule the entire operation. While Férial's question, 'How could anyone hide in the bottom of the couch?', strikes the officer as merely rhetorical, viewers hear an additional meaning.

In cinematic terms, the doubled meaning of Férial's performance is conveyed throughout the movie via a distinct, repeated framing and blocking technique that is employed in nearly all the encounters between Férial and Marcel. Each encounter between the two is initiated by a lingering shot of Férial turned away from Marcel with her face hidden from him but fully visible to viewers. For example, in two encounters, she walks beyond him, deeper into the room (in their first encounter when she approaches him for a job) or towards a window (when they meet at her apartment); two other scenes show Férial seated at a desk in the foreground, directly facing the camera, typing dictation, as Marcel paces behind her in the background of the frame. In each of these scenes, the camera pauses for a few seconds as she stares away from him. Clearly, such shots generate tension and uncertainty as to whether Férial will continue to maintain her masquerade, and what is most interesting is precisely that Férial's face does not betray her; even when Marcel's dictation becomes violently anti-Semitic, she continues to appear detached.

While Férial is *November Moon*'s most blatant mimic, other characters in the film also engage in this practice. For example a supporting character, Chantal, one-time lover of November's father and owner of the local bistro, passes as pro-Nazi by bantering casually and flirtatiously with her German patrons. Whereas the Germans equate Chantal's hospitality with 'natural' 'French' *joie de vivre*, viewers know that the purpose of her solicitousness is to deflect attention from the fraudulent industry she is involved in (at night she switches labels between costly and inexpensive wines) and from her harbouring of Férial's brother, the Resistance fighter. The doubled meaning in her telling of a La Fontaine fable in which she disparagingly but indirectly compares the Germans to ants – the subtlety of which, like Férial's masquerade, is lost on her bar patrons – exemplifies her ability to challenge the Germans' authority, to make a mockery of them.<sup>19</sup>

If, in Bhabha's overtly Lacanian formulation, 'the recognition of sexual difference is disavowed by the fixation on an object that masks the difference and restores the original presence',<sup>20</sup> certainly the fixation on Férial's 'heterosexuality', Chantal's 'Frenchness', and Lilly's 'Nazi' maternal abilities can hide the recognition of anti-fascist and, in Férial's and Lilly's cases, lesbian difference that is also at issue. I am arguing that Chantal, Lilly and Férial are able to

<sup>19</sup> And indeed, the film even allows (some of) the Germans to appear equivocal in their loyalty to Nazism as is the case with the petty officer who facilitates November's escape from the brothel. The ambiguity of this character is further reinforced by a sympathetic (and I believe quite radical) identification that the film sets up between him and November, via a dissolve from a closeup of November's face to a closeup of his face as he is executed.

<sup>20</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* p. 74.

21 Ibid p 76

22 Although some would argue that mimicry would be impossible for Jews in the context of the Holocaust where the aim was not fetishism but annihilation, it may help to remind readers that the subjects of the two films I am discussing differ significantly from films whose sole focus is the substance of the Final Solution that is those set in camps or ghettos, in terms of the respective representation of the matters and practices of anti-Semitism. While the spectre of discovery/deportment looms over both stories annihilation is not the central subject of either film. Although both films are obviously interested in the topic of anti-Semitism this is largely because it is a technology for Occupation (in *November Moon*'s case) or (in *Love Story*'s) as it constructs the life of underground Jews and their associates

23 Throughout Bhabha's writing that I have referred to there is a more than occasional ambiguity as to who is the subject of the colonial gesture the one that we might term the colonizer or the one which might be called the subjugated. This ambiguity would seem strategic for Bhabha like the psychoanalytic paradigms from which he borrows colonialism is not a uni-directional subject-forming process but rather a scene in which each of the subjects is co-implicated and mutually constitutive

24 Marcia Landy *Cinematic Uses of the Past* (Minneapolis MI: University of Minnesota Press 1996) p 17

play up, and therefore play off, the stereotype that is described in Bhabha's argument in order to forward their own libidinal and political projects. The female characters' sexuality that the Germans interpret as genuine is a construction or a performance of the stereotypical that returns the men to an illusory 'point of total identification', a place of misconstrued certainty where no questions can be asked.<sup>21</sup> Férial's mimicry of heterosexuality, Chantal's mimicry of Frenchness, and Lilly's mimicry of a 'good German mother' make of all three a kind of fetish for the Germans, restoring to them the security of ideal relations during wartime, and thereby deflecting attention from the women's oppositional work.<sup>22</sup>

So ultimately, the alignment of both *November Moon* and *Love Story* with other critical discourses about lesbianism is an ambivalent one. On the one hand, as I have discussed, both films call for the increased visibility of lesbian relationships, citing invisibility as a central characteristic of homophobic representations of lesbianism. But on the other, both also recognize the mimicry of non-lesbian subject positions as strategic in specific historical circumstances. In so doing, regardless of the makers' claims, the films work as critiques of dominant critical and popular discourses which blankly cede the moral or ethical high ground to the lesbian who is 'most out', regardless of the cultural or historical context.

It is important to remind readers that the mimics I am discussing are not the Jewish subjects in the stories but rather the non-Jews – Lilly and Férial. If we agree with Bhabha's idea that power is constitutive of a range of subjects, then we must wonder about the effects, upon the Jewish female characters in each film, of the non-Jew's undertaking to be the fetish herself. I would argue that what occurs when Férial and Lilly become the fetish is that November and Felice no longer need to 'be' it, and can cease being the amputated subject Bhabha describes.<sup>23</sup>

I shall now pursue this matter of the representation of the relationship between the Jewish and the non-Jewish characters through a discussion of the generic parameters of the films. In spite of the fact that *Love Story* is technically a nonfiction film, both it and *November Moon* employ elements of two genres – the lesbian love story and the history film. Of the latter genre, Marcia Landy has argued that both elite and popular representations of the past are permeated with the formal properties and narrative elements of melodrama.<sup>24</sup> In history films, moments of considerable national or cultural significance are transmitted through the generic components of melodramatic fiction – for example, large and small-scale betrayals, threats to individual and group welfare; subterfuge both successful and unsuccessful, reversals of fortune; changes of heart, reconciliation on personal and large-scale levels, and so on. Like other significant cultural projects, the matter of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming-to-terms-with-the-past, is

rehearsed in the history film via the dramatized relationships between individuals who are often of opposing class or cultural or ethnic groups. For instance, in *The Night Porter* (Liliana Cavani, Italy, 1974), Max, the ex-Nazi hotel employee, and Lucia, the wife of an American conductor and concentration camp survivor, play and replay the events of the past in a shifting representation of a chain of subjects, with Lucia alternatively standing for 'women, who could stand for victims, who could stand for Jews', and so on.<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, one of the more popular tropes within contemporary lesbian and gay cinema, and I would say within lesbian and gay love stories especially, is that of the interracial or inter-ethnic romance. Films such as *The Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, US, 1995), *Young Soul Rebels* (Isaac Julien, UK, 1990), and the aforementioned *The Berlin Affair* in particular have explored issues of racial difference from within the context of a gay or lesbian love story.<sup>26</sup> Ruby Rich has suggested that within queer cinema, racial difference can function in much the same way that sexual difference works within the hegemonic heterosexual love story.<sup>27</sup> If we agree with Rich, we then need to examine the function of such a trope in films about real historical events. While both *November Moon* and *Love Story* point to the possibility of reconciliation, Felice's arrest and subsequent deportation in 1944 by the Gestapo necessarily make the narrating of reconciliation in the latter film somewhat monologic, attributing the fruits of wartime effort solely to Lilly Wust, who, as I mentioned, in the 1980s received the Federal Service Cross for humanitarianism. The point is not to blame the film for Felice's absence which is, after all, a historical fact, but to consider what a more dialogic representation would look like. *November Moon* offers such a representation. In the remainder of this essay, I want to look in some detail at how von Grote translates a historically-specific cultural project, that is, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, into a fictional affair between two characters. *November Moon* represents reconciliation as a linguistic rather than an administrative project that is achieved, not through the passing of laws, but performatively through language. As I intend to show, coming to terms with the past is contingent on the fact of the persecuted, Jewish subject becoming a speaking being.

The opening shots of *November Moon* show an adult Jewish man telling a fable to a very young girl, who turns out to be his daughter, November. The scene is a flashback, recollected on the eve of World War II by the adult November, twenty or so years after she originally heard the fable as a child. What occasioned the original telling was the event of November's mother's death, the story her father tells is a Talmud legend about what happens to children just before they are born. As her father told it, an angel kisses children so that they will 'forget' everything that life will bring. In the flashback, he says, 'before they are born their whole life unfolds

<sup>25</sup> Marguerite Waller, 'Signifying the Holocaust' Liliana Cavani's *Portiere di Notte* in Laura Pietropaolo and Ada Testaferrri (eds) *Feminisms in the Cinema* (Bloomington, IN Indiana University Press 1995) p. 216

<sup>26</sup> And indeed lesbian and gay American cinema in the 1990s saw several films featuring such a trope. See for example, *The Delta* (Ira Sachs 1996) *Parallel Sons* (John Young 1994), *Rescuing Desire* (Adam Rogers, 1995) and *Out of Season* (Jeanette Buck, 1998)

<sup>27</sup> B. Ruby Rich 'When difference is (more than) skin deep' in Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar (eds) *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video* (New York Routledge 1993), pp. 318–39

before them, and also their death. But no one could live knowing when or how they are to die. So God sent an angel and with that kiss, they are able to forget everything about life and death.’ Interestingly, for a film whose cultural project is to amplify contemporary awareness of Occupation and the Holocaust, the fable insists less on the importance of knowing than on the pain involved in having to know: were one aware of all that is in store, it would be impossible to summon either the hope or strength to continue to live. Not to know, in the logic of the legend, is to inhabit a more livable state – as did, for example, Eve, to invoke another parochial tale, before the tasting of the apple. Having to know – or in the case of survivors such as Abraham Bomba in *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, France, 1985), having to remember – is almost as difficult and painful as the initial historical experience.

The issue of foreknowledge has been a nagging one for survivor historians and others attempting to make sense of the devastating effects of war, in particular the racial policies of National Socialism. Lack of awareness of the seriousness and extent of the draconian measures associated with the Final Solution has dominated explanations of both Jewish inability to resist and Allied failure to intervene. Allegations of Allied anti-semitism, on the one hand, and Jewish ‘passivity’, on the other, though clearly differing in tenor, aim and effect, have both been assuaged by the notion that not enough was known in time to make a difference. Some publicizing of historical evidence to the contrary, such as that demonstrating early Allied knowledge of the camps and ghettos for instance, has productively and significantly shifted the terms of the debate from the failure-to-know to the failure-to-act. For example, the Washington, DC Holocaust Museum’s documentation of the US decision against bombing Auschwitz well after the camp’s purpose was known, and in spite of pleas from Jewish groups to do so, is only the most recent and well-publicized example of such a shift. The issue of Jewish non-resistance is, not surprisingly, more complex. While most historians are in agreement as to the overwhelming paucity of options available, particularly after the 1942 Wannsee Conference, stereotypes of Jewish ‘denial’ and ‘docility’ have been difficult to overcome. How Jews simultaneously knew of, and continued to participate in, their own extermination is the question animating the chapter entitled ‘Soliciting the Cooperation of the Victims’ in Zygmunt Bauman’s seminal sociological study of the *Judenrate* – the Jewish leaders who administered the ghettos, acting as a link between them and the outside world.<sup>28</sup> Rather than re-asking the unanswerable – if people had known, could it have been stopped? – Bauman examines the conditions that produced the possibility for certain actions to occur in spite of what was or was not known. Although focused on differently-positioned historical subjects possessing distinctive forms of agency, what both the

<sup>28</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

29 The minutiae surrounding Czerniakow's oscillation between hope and denial on the one hand and deep despair, on the other, that eventually resulted in his final decision are preserved and available to contemporary readers. See Raul Hilberg, Stanislaw Staron and Josef Kermisz (eds), *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow: Prelude to Doom* trans. Stanislaw Staron and the staff of Yad Vashem (New York: Stein, 1979).

30 A comparable process would appear to be taking place at the end of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which concludes with the words 'it was not a story to pass on'. As November's forgetting is always only a kind of temporary stand-in for the act of 'remembering, Morrison's pass on' which means both to repeat and to 'let go', also has at once a doubled and it would seem, mutually excluding signification. *Beloved: a Novel* (New York: Knopf, 1987).

31 The idea that one should have to forget in order to begin – or rather that there is already something to forget before one begins to begin – seems a profoundly iconoclastic notion, in that it undermines the conventional relation of the present to the future and subverts the idea of time as unidirectional, continuous, regular and unique. The value of a non-progressionality has obsessed a considerable number of scholars: from Proust to Bergson to Hayden White to Walter Benjamin. Like *November Moon*, Benjamin's work is also memorable for, among other things, an angel – specifically the angel of history that appears in 'Theses on the philosophy of history', in Hannah Arendt (ed.) *Illuminations* trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 255–64.

Museum panel and Bauman's study in particular explore is the nebulous area between knowing and not knowing, that is, the type of knowledge apprehension that involves both knowing and disavowal. If people had known, could it have been stopped? The significance of Bauman's argument turns upon his displacing of this question.

At the risk of, first, exculpating those who knew the extent of the genocide, had means to intercede, and did not take steps to do so and, second, disrespecting the memory of those such as Warsaw Ghetto leader Adam Czerniakow who figured the extent of the horror in light of his own meagre interventionist capacities and subsequently made the rational choice to end his own life,<sup>29</sup> I would like to suggest that the fantasy of a knowledge-suspending angel might be of strategic importance to a fictional character such as November. Confronted with seemingly insurmountable odds with no means to act, foreknowledge, for the German–Jewish refugee, would be an encumbrance to which the sole rational response would be suicide, as it was for Czerniakow and undoubtedly countless others less well-known than he. For November as a Jew, the angel's kiss would constitute not an espousal of inaction but a strategic disavowal, a suspension of knowledge of the certainty of a violent and annihilating future. Not an evacuation of agency, the kiss would be a suspension of knowledge necessary to go on living.<sup>30</sup> In psychoanalytic terms, the kiss would function in a manner similar to the concept of the fetish, which arrests the process of knowing in the moment just prior to the subject's realization of knowledge too painful to bear.<sup>31</sup>

As the film does not return to the opening scene of the father's telling of the legend, it could be said that *November Moon* re-performs the very act of repression that the fable itself seems to advocate – at least, until a very important moment towards the end of the story. In a film full of verbal references to the history of the record – the Spanish Civil War, Germany's invasion of Poland, the French armistice, Liberation – the moment when Férial learns of her mother's death is one of the most intimate. The scene opens abruptly with a tight closeup on the faces of November and Férial, firmly held by November. Férial sobs and tries to make sense of the suddenness of the event. How will she arrange for the funeral? How is she to contact her brother? In an effort to try to comfort Férial, November recalls the story her father told her a long time ago, at the time of her own mother's death. Speaking his words to Férial, she repeats out loud the story of the angel that is spoken by her father at the beginning of the film. Her exact words are 'Before we are born, we know everything that will come to pass in our lives, even our death. But since no one could live, not even for one second, knowing all this, God sent down an angel who kisses us on the forehead before we are born into the world, so that we may forget everything.'



Although the death of F  rial's mother is merely the first in a series of climactic circumstances that mark a turning point in the narrative and push it towards resolution, the incident seems arbitrary in a film which is otherwise extremely economical in its depiction of the domestic. The mother's death, which we do not see, whose cause is only briefly referred to and not entirely clear, seems narratively unnecessary to the film, which, in the few moments that follow, will be wholly concerned with resolving the occurrences of the war's end. The function of the mother's death is to provide November with a chance to tell, or rather re-tell, the story of the angel.

A character whose structural and, in 1940s parlance, racial position in the story leaves her little room for physical agency, November spends most of the film literally and metaphorically on the run, reacting to the actions and decisions of those with more power and freedom of movement than she. When she is not shown running from or being brutalized by the Germans, November is dependent on the mercy and will of others, like F  rial and F  rial's mother, spending much of the time physically confined, for example in a barn in the unoccupied zone, or in the hiding place in the underpart of the couch. Although the film permits her an occasional gesture of defiance, she largely exists as a fugitive who must remain out of sight and away from the light of day, and, most importantly, silent. Throughout much of *November Moon*, November's access to verbal agency or voice and the power of analysis is limited and ineffective. Although the beginning of the film opens with the image of her, suggesting that this will be her story, the first words spoken are not hers but those of her father. In the scene where the two women first meet, November is harassed by a set of anti-Semitic boys, but it is F  rial who appears, vocally intervenes, and escorts November away. Whereas F  rial on two occasions verbally acknowledges her relationship with November (in a scene with her brother, and in a scene with her mother), November never speaks about it directly. In sum, whereas F  rial is allowed the luxury of analysis and commentary, November, for the most part, only silently reacts. Even the film's title, that would seem intended to address her, dispossesses her. 'November Moon' is not a name she has created, but is in fact a nickname made up by F  rial's brother.

In the chapter on *Shoah* in her book on the subject of witnessing, Shoshana Felman writes of the contest between interviewer and witness over breaking the silence on the subject of the Holocaust. The difficulty for both the witness and for those who were not there in speaking about the Holocaust derives from the 'pact' of silence struck between the historical event and its witness: as long as the witness remains silent, there is no event to be spoken about, as long as the horror is not revealed, there need not be, need not have been, a witness.<sup>32</sup> Thus Lanzmann's accomplishment, in Felman's thinking, is to force what many survivors regard as unspeakable events to be

<sup>32</sup> And it is for this reason that Felman designates the Holocaust as an event without a witness. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 219.

discussed Lanzmann's success derives from his polite disrespect for codes that would preserve both the privacy of the survivor and the sacredness of the events; his objective is primarily to get the witness to speak. Accordingly, he starts slowly, attentive to the tiniest detail – 'What were the [gas] vans like?', 'What colour?' – before hedging more difficult questions – 'How did you feel when you saw all these naked women arriving with children [into the gas chamber]?' In doing so, Lanzmann 'desacrilizes' the historical circumstances and deflates their paralyzing power, which does not erase it, but rather releases it. He thereby establishes a powerful, public, and institutionalized forum for voices that did not previously have one, a way for survivors of the experiences of ghettoization and internment to 'own' their own stories, speak them in the first person

In *November Moon*, November's telling of the Talmud legend to Férial allows her to own what had previously only been spoken to her as a child by another, and, crucially, to locate herself as agent and subject proper of the story. There are four signs that indicate this important shift: firstly, she tells the story, that is, it is her voice that is heard telling it, not that of her father; secondly, the story is told in the present tense, not recollected (she originally recalls it in a flashback); thirdly, she tells the story in the first person plural, using 'we' (her father had told it in the third person), and fourthly, in this new telling, she occupies the position of the angel-agent as opposed to the object, the one receiving the kiss. Brushing back the hair on Férial's forehead as she relates the story, looking as if she would kiss Férial, November becomes the agent of a narrative that had previously signalled her historical dispossession, constructed her as the forgetter. What this second telling of the story does is allow her to redeem a part of her past upon which her ability to face the future depended and, henceforth, depends. At stake in the re-telling of the angel story is not just the temporal frame of its utterance, the past, but the temporal frame of its enunciation, which is the present. With the recovery of the angel story, November's past is assumed, released, and made available for the present and indeed for the future. With November's assumption of the first person plural pronoun, she identifies herself with the children of the story, and by extension, with the collective subject-victims of the Holocaust. No longer simply the recipient of the story, November becomes, most importantly, with this re-telling, its transmitter. While the first telling, occurring on the eve of the war, coincided with the beginning of a historic loss whose proportions need no emphasizing, the second telling, heard at the war's end, marks not just the possibility of cultural survival but of cultural continuation. And the kiss? As it occurs between two historically adversarial bodies – Jew : non-Jew, subjugator : subjugated – the kiss could signal a tentative reconciliation, at least between Férial and November, and potentially between the different audiences that they symbolically stand in for.

Like nearly all shots of Férial and November in the film, the women are imaged throughout the angel/kiss sequence in an intimate two-shot. From the women's first encounter after they flee the anti-Semitic boys, to various scenes of them in the south of France, to shots of them in bed – they are nearly always depicted together in the frame, rather than isolated in alternating shots as they would be in shot/reverse-shot sequences. Although there are several meanings we could ascribe to this stylistic choice, the most obvious is that it engenders a sense of unity between the characters. The fact that the two-shot is not employed for other characters in the film suggests furthermore that it is specific to November and Férial as a lesbian couple. This stylistic configuration, and the fact that the kiss takes place between two women, signals finally the need for women, feminists and lesbians to participate in the process of coming to terms with the past. What is suggested by the final scene, where Férial is denounced as a collaborator and cruelly humiliated by her neighbours, is that the burden of historical reckoning and accountability has not dissipated, but shifted. No longer a scenario that pits perpetrators against victims, the final scene points to the need to cast a wider net around the issue of historical responsibility that too frequently has congealed upon two binary oppositions.

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## reports and debates

special debate:

## Inside television: television studies and the sociology of culture

GEORGINA BORN

*While viewers' active engagements with these narratives should not be valorized as expressions of choice, resistance or some sort of sovereign agency, it is also essential to note that producers, script writers, and advertisers keep a close watch on viewers' responses and, very often, storylines and characters are changed accordingly<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Purnima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: an Ethnography of Television Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 1999) p. 357

*There was a kind of narcissism in [the old BBC] Drama . . . In the old culture of the BBC, producers would do their own thing, and brought that to the Controllers. [Now,] schedulers are much more competitive: there is more of a research basis than before . . . Producers were too autonomously driven, they didn't concern themselves with what the audience might want. This was an eye-opener for me – and so the aim of [audience] research is to educate producers about what the audience might want. Producers come to some research groups, and they get feedback that way. Research has its place in a hierarchical organisation. XX [a strategist colleague] thinks it's determinant: I think it's important but only in its place; producers see it differently again. It's useful to see popular programmes deconstructed, good for my education. It's useful to know the mass audience's prejudices, useful as a tool for popular drama*

– *educative, not prescriptive* . Preston Front [BBC1 drama series, 1995–7] was thoroughly researched: [the research] said that some will go for it, not a large part of the audience, and it was right, and we still commissioned it We don't do many pilots; usually research is done after the first series and concerns whether to re-commission or not Comedy is much more unpredictable, also with the public Shows wax and wane, the subject matter doesn't matter: there are no genres in comedy How do you account for [the success of] One Foot in the Grave? You can't second guess, [in comedy] the best things don't fit into received categories.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Interview with an executive channel strategist for BBC1, the main BBC television channel 19 January 1996

<sup>3</sup> *Our Commitment to You BBC Statement of Promises to Viewers and Listeners* (London BBC 1997) p 23

*We promise to be accountable and responsive*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Screen* vol 41 no 1 (2000) pp 33–50 The current article is a revised version of a plenary paper for a day conference on the state of television research held at the Royal Society of Arts London 19 November 1999

This article proposes that television research should be reconnected to a reconstructed sociology of culture It is also in part a reply to Simon Frith's article 'The black box: the value of television and the future of television research'<sup>4</sup> Frith's article drew on his experience as the director of the Economic and Social Research Council's research programme in Media Economics and Media Culture (MEMC) In making my arguments here, I refer briefly to material from my own research project in that programme, entitled 'Redefining public service broadcasting: an ethnography of the BBC' Based on two years' ethnographic fieldwork inside various departments of BBC Television between late 1995 and late 1998, the research aimed to elucidate how the institution, and those working for it, were reconceiving the public service remit in the context of the pressures stemming from re-regulation, intensifying competition and globalization in the television industry<sup>5</sup> Within the MEMC Programme, I was the researcher most engaged in mapping not only the BBC as an institution, but certain television production cultures and wider professional discourses in television These insights ground much of what follows<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Fieldwork took in the Drama Group the Documentaries department and parts of BBC News including the production office of the flagship nightly news and current affairs programme *Newsnight* Less intensive fieldwork took in parts of BBC Entertainment the Community Programme Unit and the channel Controllers' offices Interviews were carried out across and at all levels of the BBC

<sup>6</sup> I stress that this paper is primarily a conceptual one It is not about the research I carried out on the BBC although the ideas stem in part from that research and I allude to it briefly in the course of the paper

As I respond to Frith's paper, I highlight some of the larger issues raised by my BBC study that have the status of central problems in Television Studies but which, however, have been generally neglected There are three linked arguments that I wish to propose First, I shall argue for the ontological priority of production over consumption in the sociological analysis of culture, including television Relatedly, we should be concerned with the way that cultural production has cumulative historical effects in the formation of the prevailing currents of public culture Cultural production is not the only source of such currents, but it is a formative one Both points provide a renewed epistemological foundation, if one were needed, for a concern with value in cultural production. The second argument follows, and it concerns power in cultural production, specifically the necessary and inescapable representational and

- 7 Walter Benjamin, 'The author as producer', in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (eds), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978) Hans Magnus Enzensberger 'Constituents of a theory of the media' *New Left Review*, no 64 (1970), pp 13–36
- 8 Nicholas Garnham *Emancipation the Media, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000) ch 5
- 9 See for example, Peter Dahlgren *Television and the Public Sphere* (London: Sage 1995), and Joke Hermes, 'Gender and media studies no woman no cry', in John Corner et al *International Media Research* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp 65–95
- 10 The concern with agency touches on the need for clarification of the concept in social theory writ large, which commonly fails to discriminate between those kinds of agency that may be subsumed within a general account of sociocultural reproduction, and those referring to forms of intervention in reproduction which *make a difference*. My own view is that only the latter represents a non-trivial use of the concept
- 11 The BBC study has implications for developing a sociological theory of reflexivity, requiring a distinction between those disciplinary formalized reflexivities that are institutionalized – such as auditing practices – and those individual forms of reflexivity central both to self-consciousness and creative agency. See Ulrich Beck Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash *Reflexive Modernization Politics, Tradition, and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994)
- 12 See for example Pierre Bourdieu and Hans Haacke, *Free Exchange* (Cambridge: Polity 1995) For Bourdieu's sociology of cultural production, see *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993)

cultural power in the moment of cultural production. One naive reading of the Foucauldian critique of the imbrication of power and knowledge has been to denounce this imbrication, as though it could be evaded. But the power to represent and to create – in sociolinguistic terms, to speak, to engage in the struggle for the sign – is foundational for cultural politics, as it is in some versions of critical theory.<sup>7</sup> This is implicitly recognized in much of Cultural Studies, which has celebrated acts of creativity from the social and cultural margins but has abjured the study of centres of professional and specialized cultural production. The political economy of the media, too, has avoided a concern with the labile moment of power and potential agency in cultural production in favour of structural, macro-readings of power that tend to flatten out such agency as may on occasion exist. In this respect this paper suggests the utility of a new conception of the intellectual in mass-mediated cultural production.

Nicholas Garnham has recently raised the question of intellectuals in a discussion of media production in a symptomatic way. His insistence on the continuing relevance of the notion of the intellectual is timely and important, but the concept needs to be developed in a new direction. Generally, Garnham places intellectuals within civil society and outside the media, and when he writes of media intellectuals they are equated with journalists, with a rational-informational, public-sphere model of intervention.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, in tune with the critique of the rationalist preoccupations of public sphere media theory,<sup>9</sup> I suggest that we attend to a category of specifically media intellectuals whose task is to mediate the generic dynamics that bridge the past, present and future of media output. Their skill is in the art of judging how to progress a set of generic possibilities in given conditions, and how to balance the enhancement of the entertainment, pleasure and education of the audience. This points to the importance of theorizing agency,<sup>10</sup> reflexivity<sup>11</sup> and, again, value, and of asking when the power of cultural production is used responsibly, creatively, inventively in given conditions, and when not. In this sense, this paper points also to some limits of Bourdieu's sociology of cultural production, which conceives of cultural power negatively, in the guise of symbolic violence, which theorizes agency primarily in microsociological and individualist terms, and which has balked at the problem of developing a positive analysis of cultural value, as well as a positive conception of the aesthetic as a realm of experience and intellectual life. The result is that the positive possibilities of cultural production tend to be portrayed only in exceptionalist terms.<sup>12</sup>

The third argument in this paper concerns the need to theorize the place of 'external' discourses and knowledges in the reflexive processes of cultural production, the way in which dominant economic and political discourses – in the BBC, discourses of

auditing, accountability, audience research – are mediated by, or relayed through, media institutions and media production. In his recent book *The Laws of the Market*, Michel Callon argues against those economic sociologists who denounce economics for its inaccurate, undersocialized account of economic actors. Callon suggests instead that we should treat both economics and sociology, and by implication other systems of public and specialized knowledge, *performatively*: that is, look at what they do, how they are brought in to condition social practice, folded into social process; for example, in relation to economics, how it helps to form real market places.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that we attend to the conditions within which such forms of knowledge are deployed by media intellectuals and institutions. It suggests, too, the need for judgement – for attention to the moments at which such a deployment has creative or inventive effects, or the converse – which in turn requires an analysis of creative invention and its opposite, anti-invention.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Michel Callon *The Laws of the Market* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> On invention and anti-invention see Andrew Barry, *Political Machines: Governing a Technological Society* (London: Athlone Press, 2001) and Andrew Barry and Georgina Born *Invention, defensive innovation and inertia* (n.d.). Anti-invention refers to those processes that result in the avoidance of significant change in any field of practice.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Thompson 'Zapped: why public service TV has to change' speech to the Banff Television Conference, 12 June 2000.

Television Studies has always risked becoming a ghetto. Because its object, television, is so powerful, so complex and yet so powerfully mundane, television research has tended to drift into conceptual self-sufficiency, to become a side-stream of media research. Faced with extraordinary pressures of change and extreme degrees of uncertainty as television moves into the digital age, these tendencies can become even more pronounced. Yet it is precisely periods such as the present that demonstrate the need for conceptual breadth. As I write, the UK is witnessing unprecedented public debate over the future of television, stoked jointly by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's consultation exercise in advance of the coming Communications White Paper and by a speech by Mark Thompson, the BBC's Director of Television, in which he proposes that BBC television should move from 'universal', mixed-programming channels to generic channels.<sup>15</sup> The White Paper debate concerns the future of communications regulation in the UK in the context of predictions of imminent technological convergence. It therefore concerns also the survival and character of public service broadcasting (PSB) in the predicted era of digital convergence in which, some claim, the end of spectrum scarcity plus a mature consumer sovereignty make PSB doubly redundant. Thompson's speech rests on the notion that, with the advent of new technologies – the Electronic Programme Guide and the TiVo, a super-video recorder – the channel-based viewing habits of the previous era are inevitably being superseded by genre-based multichannel grazing. In both cases, the debate divides between those who claim that certain changes in technology and viewing habits are inevitable or have already occurred, and those who see these claims as erroneous, based on a fallacious but heady combination of technological determinism

and, often, commercial interest. It is at moments such as these that the insights of the history of technology become invaluable as a means of relativizing the powerful teleologies of discourses of technological transition.<sup>16</sup>

But it is also in periods like the present that Television Studies needs to analyze the power of discourses to form practice, to bring into being the very visions which they espouse. This highlights in turn the importance in television research of engaging in a combined analytics and an intervention to recognize that critical analysis cannot be disengaged from an attempt to intervene in the struggle over the discourses being employed in the media industries and institutions themselves, and in public and policy debate about their futures. Critique and intervention are far from mutually incompatible, the issue is the adequacy of the critical analysis, and normatively-driven critique that fails to attend sufficiently to the complexities of the object will simply be ignored. There should be a productive symbiosis in the advance of academic and public knowledge. We, as researchers, should learn about and from the object; through reflection and analysis we should achieve critical distance; and we may then decide to intervene *in* the object, through advocacy, journalism, consultancy or policy writings. This is a sociological model of the discursive construction of reality expanded onto three planes: not only in terms of the standard account of media discourses' powers of construction, but in terms of the ways that wider discursive formations construct the very workings and practices of media institutions and industries, and, lastly, in the way the social sciences themselves are increasingly engaged in 'discourse coalitions'. In Beck's words, such discourse coalitions 'create, design and alter "cognitive maps"'. . . . [The question is] how reality-in-itself is (re-)produced by discourse politics and coalitions within institutional contexts of decision, action and work.<sup>17</sup>

Such a position of mediation and engagement is not without risks. Throughout my BBC research I have been the subject of attention, by turns threatening and cajoling, from representatives of the Murdoch press. Clearly they believe I may have material that could be used by them to attack the BBC; and ultimately I will have little control over certain discourses produced on the back of my research. Knowing this, and out of ethical commitment, I have carefully and confidentially sent early writings to BBC and ex-BBC informants for feedback. A draft report was sent unofficially to those assisting the new director-general, Greg Dyke, in his review of the BBC. an example of how my writings have re-entered the institution, to inform its own reflexivity, albeit always in motivated ways. Nor is the position of the critical researcher without difficulty. Overall, access to the BBC was extremely difficult to achieve and sustain during the study, perhaps understandably there was a resistance to

16 On the way technological discourses configure social change see Michel Callon 'Society in the making: the study of technology as a tool for sociological analysis' in Wiebe E. Bijker et al., *The Social Construction of Technological Systems* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1989), and Michael Callon, 'Techno-economic networks and irreversibility' in J. Law (ed.), *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination* (London: Routledge, 1991). On the BBC's premature investment in digital radio at the urging of the radio manufacturers when the market failed to take off as predicted, see Maggie Brown 'Is anybody listening?', *Media Guardian* 3 July 2000, pp. 6–7.

17 Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), pp. 29–30.



independent scrutiny and a fear that I had a prior 'agenda'. Nonetheless, with persistence I did achieve substantial access to a number of spaces, and later I offer brief headlines from the ensuing analysis

Ethnographic research on media institutions and media production is a particularly good way of learning about the complexities of the object. It is also a good method for interrogating and reworking the structural readings of media process that can be derived from political-economic analysis. Recognizing the need to analyze the role of individual and collective agency as well as structural processes in theorizing the dynamics of the media industries requires that research must get close to its objects, again, ethnographic research does this rather well. There is a common misunderstanding as to what such ethnographic work entails – that it ends inevitably with the researcher 'going native', adopting the informants' points of view, and with an inability to gain critical analytical distance from those perspectives. While it is true that the characteristic attempt in ethnographic research to achieve a kind of double consciousness – *both* empathy *and* distance – involves a necessary methodological detour through identification, it is an error to confuse the detour with the final destination. It is a means to greater insight. Achieving distance means attempting a move beyond relativism, and it is here that ethnographic work necessarily entails an engagement with the problem of value.

One of the celebrated highlights of BBC television in 1996 was a documentary serial called *The House*. Filmed inside the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, it was a fly-on-the-wall account of a period of mounting crisis, and gained notoriety for a scene in which managers were shown planning to sack a member of staff. *The House* represents one of the proliferating subgenres of documentary, which I call 'power fly-on-the-wall'.<sup>18</sup> The complexity of my ethnographic encounter with the BBC is shown by the following fieldwork anecdote. In the period that *The House* was being transmitted, I was talking to a senior television executive when Alan Yentob, then Controller of BBC1, entered the room to speak to him, not knowing I was there. Yentob shot me (the ethnographer-cum-documentarist) a look, smiled, and said 'Ah, Georgina! Shall we stage a sacking for you?'

Packed with reflexivity and irony, the subtexts were multiple and rich in meaning.

- that he knew that I knew that one of the main causes of internal and external criticism of BBC management was for its callous shedding of staff, a symptom of the marketization of the BBC attendant on the policy of Producer Choice, the 25% quota for

<sup>18</sup> *The House* (d. Michael Waldman, Double Exposure tx BBC2 1996). The origins of this subgenre lie probably in the documentaries of Roger Graef.

independent commissions, and the wider casualization of the industry,

- that I should take this as a teasing sign that, unlike his own documentary filmmakers, I would *not* in fact be given access to such controversial and 'private' managerial moments within the BBC;
- that he and I both knew there was a contradiction in the BBC demanding this kind of access for its own (and its independent) filmmakers while itself resisting such access, a contradiction the BBC seemed happy to risk being publicly aired through my research. This in turn indicates the BBC's continuing power and legitimacy in British public life, its belief in the invulnerability of the journalistic privilege that allows it to hide its own functioning while demanding, in the name of public interest, total scrutiny of others' functioning, including that of other public institutions;
- and – before the scandals that were shortly to erupt in British television around the faking of documentary and reality shows<sup>19</sup> – that, despite the BBC's high moral claims for the professional realism of its factual programming, 'documentary realism' is a tenuous affair and might involve judicious staging.

<sup>19</sup> I refer to the crises attendant on the revelations of fakery and staging in relation to Carlton Television's investigative documentary *The Connection* and the BBC's daytime talk show *Vanessa*

Later in fieldwork, I hit a difficult period in which my access to observe the next Controller of BBC1, Michael Jackson, and his team had come and gone without clear reason. Jackson and I had met, apparently warmly, several times to discuss terms: yes, I could watch, he could well understand the interest in ethnographic work on scheduling and other Controller activities, but could he wield a blue pencil to any writings? and so on. I began to get paranoid as I could not understand what was going on, suddenly it seemed that his secretary would not answer calls. I had a dream one night: I am meeting MJ in his Television Centre office (where he was known for having on his coffee table stylish toys, which he played with during meetings). We are seated on sofas, talking; he is smiling, pleasant. Suddenly I notice he has five darts in his hand with which he is playing. One by one, as we talk, he lobbs the darts my way in a parabolic arc and they embed themselves in my ankle – my Achilles heel? I wake feeling terrified of the subtexts. Am I being toyed with? What vulnerability of mine is he playing on?<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The account of the dream is taken from my field diary. July 1996

These stories are about key figures in my BBC study and in British television. In case the anecdotes are read as critical of these figures, let me make clear that this is not what is intended. Rather, they are intended reflexively to convey the complex intertextual nature of fieldwork experience and its interpretation, an experience that reaches

even into the dreamlife of the ethnographer. The Jackson story illustrates also the fallibility of the researcher: my paranoia was excessive, but in the context of the obstacles to access that I encountered, perhaps predictably so. The stories are obviously about my own sense of fragility. But I now read them also as being about *their* fragility and defensiveness – a defensiveness that raised my hackles during fieldwork. Yentob and Jackson remain central agents in British PSB; they have enormous responsibility – daily and long-term – for the reproduction of PSB and steering it into a difficult future.<sup>21</sup> In this period they were henchmen of John Birt, then director-general of the BBC; but, focused on the creative challenges of PSB, they existed always in tension with Birtism. As Murdoch and the commercial television lobbies pursue aggressive campaigns to rid themselves of the BBC and its cost-elevating standards, Yentob's and Jackson's institutional positions and what they represent philosophically in British television are under concerted and unprecedented attack. I would identify them as two of the most prominent organic intellectuals of British television – but as part of a much larger cadre of such intellectuals. British television is replete with sophisticated and reflexive debates, debates informing and informed by practice, concerning the optimal output that can be achieved in given conditions. Figures like Yentob and Jackson, the editors of key strands, executive producers and producers are constantly engaged in reading what it is possible to do, and what it is not, in prevailing market and aesthetic conditions, in bringing forward what they learn through their networks to be interesting or inventive developments in any particular generic space, in balancing risks and apparent certainties, in moving forward the juggernaut of PSB in its double mission of both meeting and exceeding audience tastes. They achieve it, of course, with varying success.

Frith's paper addresses the value of television and ends by conceiving a future shape for television research. There are many insights and much with which to agree. But the central problem is his reiteration of the very subdisciplinary divisions that he begins by criticizing. At the end of the paper Frith lists production studies, textual analysis and audience studies as three distinct areas of work that, however, should be in dialogue. But what Television Studies needs is the courage to engage analytically and theoretically with their interrelations, so as to progress in thinking *across* the divisions.<sup>22</sup> Stuart Hall's 'Encoding/decoding' can be read as issuing this challenge twenty years ago.<sup>23</sup> Rising to the challenge implies new thinking to extend the 'centrifugal-centripetal' model of the relation between television output and wider public cultures.<sup>24</sup> Crucially, it means probing in what ways, over the medium and long term, in relation to real historical process, changes in television

21 Having been Controller of BBC2 and BBC1, Alan Yentob became BBC director of television in the late 1990s. Following the arrival of the new director general Greg Dyke in April 2000 Yentob became director of drama, entertainment and children's broadcasting – tantamount to the creative head of the BBC. Michael Jackson, also formerly Controller of BBC2 and BBC1, left the BBC in summer 1997 to become chief executive of Channel Four Television, Britain's primary PSB-regulated channel for minority, diverse and experimental television.

22 One research project in the MEMC programme did exactly this. David Buckingham's 'Children's media culture: education, entertainment and the public sphere' involved historical analysis of changing policy discourses, the texts of children's television and study of contemporary child audiences.

23 Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/decoding' in Hall et al. *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Hutchinson, 1980).

24 John Corner, *Television Form and Public Address* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995) p. 5.

culture influence and interrelate with wider social and cultural processes. In a sense this restates the original concerns of British Cultural Studies, focused on the complex interrelations between media culture, popular culture and culture 'as a way of life'. However, with notable exceptions, television audience research since the 1980s has tended to suffer a kind of disciplinary autism – a reluctance to engage with medium and text analyses, let alone production studies – and the result has been that questions such as these have not, on the whole, been asked. One notable place they *have* been asked is in locally-based studies by anthropologists concerned with media and the mediation of popular sentiment and collective identity. These studies begin not with television, but with the question of the character of differentiated lifeworlds and their transformation, in which television, video, radio, cinema and music play salient roles.<sup>25</sup> At once particularistic and holistic, such studies commonly engage with the text, and sometimes also with production, they understand this as necessary in tracing the circuits of meaning in context.

As I work through my BBC study, and as I teach the BBC and PSB to my students, two incommensurable literatures face me. First, I teach the notion of the BBC's role in constructing a national culture. Here I draw, for sophisticated versions, on a Foucauldian paradigm enunciated by James Donald, Tony Bennett, Toby Miller and others.<sup>26</sup> It is a crude but sharp tool for filleting the politicized pretensions of dominant cultural institutions. It leaves aside agency and interest, but focuses astutely on the historical mix of high culture, class power and government. What it tells little about – apart from the Foucauldian concept of subjectification, which implies a productivity and *effectivity* to the forming of subjectivities in discourse – is whether and to what extent the kinds of governmentality described succeed in moulding popular subjectivities, or 'the audience'. In this, ironically, it shares a weakness of ideology theories.

Alternatively, in discussing media and the wider culture, I could draw on the concept of the 'social imaginary' – a post-Foucauldian notion of the positive formation of public culture and collective identifications, one purged of the Foucauldian analysis of power.<sup>27</sup> Or I could refer to Raymond Williams's concept of 'structures of feeling'.<sup>28</sup> Or I could draw on the media ritual perspective on television's role in social integration and the affirmation of collective identity.<sup>29</sup> But while seductive for the simple proposition that media and cultural production have broader effects on the collective imagination and resonate with social-historical experiences and wider discursive practices, notions of the imaginary, structure of feeling and collective ritual remain overly agnostic. They proffer a conceptual universe in which we no longer credit major media institutions with normative or repressive or interested drives, nor with the capacity for

- 25 See for example Hamid Naficy, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (Minneapolis MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Eric Michaels, 'For a cultural future: Francis Jupurrurla makes TV at Yuendumu' in *Bad Aboriginal Art* (Minneapolis MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) pp. 99–126. Lila Abu Lughod, 'The objects of soap opera: Egyptian television and the cultural politics of modernity', in Daniel Miller (ed.), *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local* (London: Routledge, 1995). Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics*.
- 26 James Donald, *Sentimental Education* (London: Verso, 1992). Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995). Toby Miller, *The Well-Tempered Self: Citizenship, Culture, and the Postmodern Subject* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
- 27 Faye Ginsburg, 'From ECU to wide angle: ethnographic film to the anthropology of media', in Robert Stam and Toby Miller (eds), *A Companion to Film Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming).
- 28 See, for example Charlotte Brunsdon's use of the concept in her analysis of the discursive contexts of British crime-based series of the 1980s and early 1990s: 'Structure of anxiety: recent British television crime fiction', *Screen* vol. 39 no. 3 (1998) pp. 223–43.
- 29 Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: the Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
- 30 See the criticism of Dayan and Katz by J. Alexander and R. Jacobs, 'Mass communication, ritual and civil society', in Tamar Liebes and James Curran (eds), *Media, Ritual and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998) pp. 23–41.

representational biases and misrepresentation<sup>30</sup> Power is flattened out

Secondly, I take my students through the media effects and audience studies literatures. This leaves us aware that: a) social positioning influences reading in complex ways and that reception is differentiated, b) in some versions, that interpretation is so active, labile and 'open' that there is little utility in attending analytically to texts or medium characteristics. 'The audience' is reified and autonomous. There is, as others have noted, a kind of reverse essentialism in this reification of the audience as 'other'.<sup>31</sup>

My students wonder about the disjuncture between these two literatures and about how, methodologically and analytically, they could be bridged. One posits a universe of almost total effectivity through subjectification (into the national culture, into suburban domesticity); the other a universe of almost total absence of determinate effectivity.

But I am faced in my BBC research by these questions: I watch the BBC Documentaries department and its professional community at work and in debate over the current highs and lows of various subgenres: docusoaps, history docs, 'power fly-on-the-wall' docs. For all their intense collective concern with the minutiae of the ethics and aesthetics of each subgenre in process, for all this reflexivity, does it matter what kind of documentary output gets made? In my view such collective reflexivity is immanent in producers' intentionality, and thus influences the nature of texts. But unless we consider the ways in which it contributes to the shifting reproduction in any historical moment of an ongoing generic space, a space which itself has variable but real effects in the wider public culture, then surely it matters not at all. My view, of course, is that it does matter, that the continuing existence of occasional good historical or crosscultural documentaries in British primetime is a result of just such a collective professional reflexivity, and that it has conditioned both the tone of British media culture and, therefore, elements of the wider public culture.

Or I observe BBC executives and strategists in dialogue with external policymakers concerning the future shape of BBC services in the digital era. They ask: should the BBC continue to focus on a core of national channels with mixed schedules or, as proposed in Thompson's speech, move to a plethora of generic and niche channels? Does such a shift matter or not, and why? What kinds of changes would it bring to television culture, and hence the wider public culture? In the British context this is at once an urgent normative and an urgent policy question, and it demands some kind of analysis. At present Television Studies is not equipped to answer it.

In short: what is the point of the micro and macro normative concerns, and the policy interventions, of television and media research – why the preoccupation with PSB, public spheres, innovation, diversity – if we cannot reconnect them with an analysis

31 Marty Allor 'Relocating the site of the audience' *Critical Studies in Mass Communications* vol. 5 no. 3 (1988) pp. 217–33

32 Brunson, in *Structure of anxiety* attempts just such a connection between historical discursive currents and the transformations of the cop genre and ends with a call for empirical work on production as well as genre

of their interrelations with both wider cultural processes and the conditioning of subjectivities? It is surely time that Television Studies took this on.<sup>32</sup> When these issues have been raised in recent years, the approach has been narrowly microsociological, often influenced by hermeneutics, ethnomethodology or phenomenology. Questions of analyzing the mediation of large-scale societal and discursive processes have been marginalized in favour of a focus on individualist conceptions of the everyday character of audiencehood and how social-historical conditions bear on this experience. But even an aggregate of such conceptions can never add up to an analysis of collective cultural processes and the role of media culture in dominant systems of public knowledge. Audience-centred research from this perspective both starts from and inevitably returns to a microsociological problematic.

In considering the need to integrate Television Studies, Frith draws a number of conceptual distinctions: quality is a regulatory discourse, value is an economic discourse; good television is an aesthetic discourse, and finally, there is the experience of television, equated with reception. The categories are neat. They apparently reflect real sociocultural divisions between the regulators, the major institutions and commercial players, independents, producers and audiences, between the British scene and the global. As he develops the categories, Frith seems to grant a unity to the 'popular audience', saying '[producers have a] suspicion of the audience aesthetic, of popular taste'. This tends to go along conceptually with the notion of a strict separation between the popular taste – this pristine universe of the autonomous audience – and the judgements of producers or regulators. It is implied that the two are utterly distinct. But I want to muddy this distinction by pointing to a number of articulations between media producers and institutions, and audiences. Frith is right that 'the audience' or its 'tribes'<sup>33</sup> figure increasingly in internal professional debates concerning television output, a phenomenon well analyzed by Ien Ang and others. Discourse on the audience is an inevitable, but a highly variable, feature of all cultural production, as Antoine Hennion has argued. But simple functionalist accounts of the fit between producer projections of the intended audience and the actual audience that results will not suffice.<sup>34</sup> The issue requires that we examine empirically what kinds of conceptions of audience or public are deployed, and to what end. Moreover, there may be several such processes, and they may exist in tension.

Corporately, audience research was embraced by the BBC in the 1990s as an apparent solution to the populist critique of the BBC for elitism and unresponsive, producer-led programming. Through audience research, the BBC was to become responsive to audience

33 The reference is to a much-vaunted BBC strategy concept from the late 1990s in which on the basis of qualitative audience research the BBC audience became conceived as a series of 'tribes' based on clusters of lifestyle characteristics, rather than in terms of the standard demographic classifications

34 Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London: Routledge 1991). Antoine Hennion 'The production of success: an anti-musicology of the pop song' *Popular Music* no. 3 (1983) pp. 159–93. For a functionalist account see Diana Crane *The Production of Culture* (London: Sage 1992) ch. 5

tastes. In the standard neoliberal critique, voiced by Margaret Thatcher, Rupert Murdoch and other commercial players, producer elites have imposed their tastes on the public, restricting consumer choice and televisual diversity. In reality this was always an argument aimed at attacking existing institutional monopolies and replacing them with new commercial ones. Audience research was seen by BBC strategists in parallel as one of a number of corporate responses to the rising governmental discourse of the necessity of practices of 'accountability' in public sector organizations. The stated aim was to use research for democratic ends. BBC audience research became increasingly sophisticated, ambitious and exhaustive during the 1990s, there was a shift from quantitative to qualitative, mainly focus group, research. Ethnographic research was commissioned from external companies. While the greater humanism and holism of this research may appear progressive when compared to ratings, in fact focus group research was employed to yield new kinds of reified and reductive representations of 'audiencehood'. It functioned partly as a disciplinary tool by which strategists and commissioners could chastise producers for failing to meet what were described as audience wants, but which more accurately involved charges of failing to match the genres and successes of the competition. Broadcast research was also a central means of extreme rationalization of the schedule, its division into precise slots defined by projected demographics, budget and genre for which commissions were then sought.

But to dwell only on these institutional processes is to miss a parallel dimension of articulation: the ways in which producers engage imaginatively with 'the audience'. As the opening quotations to this article attest, audience research forms part of a process of professional and ethical reflection on, and education in, audience mores by those with the power to commission and produce. Television producers operate across a complex calculus of forces, two major components of which are, on the one hand, aesthetic and generic judgements circulating among genre-specific professional peer networks and, on the other, projections as to what will engage the existing or anticipated audience. The two are entwined, although one can be ascendant over the other, and the degree of art can be as great whether the aim is to 'take risks' in a given genre or not. Producers gain great satisfaction from discovering that their combined attempt to spin a new variant of a genre and to recapture the audience imagination has succeeded. The greater the potential risk taken while holding the audience, the greater the satisfaction. A knowing, worldly cynicism is reserved for those (many) projects that aim solely to leapfrog on the competition's success by imitation, and for those projects based on little generic ambition, conceived often by cross-fertilising two existing successful shows or genres. Even in formulaic, anti-inventive projects of this kind that trade in slight

twists of the familiar, the task of resecuring the maximum audience is considerable and cannot be assured.

But while 'the audience' figures in these ways as an imaginary term in producers' aesthetic and ethical reflexivities, this does not overturn the fact that producer and commissioner judgements and practices delimit the universe of viewing that 'the audience' inhabits. Cumulatively, the culture of 'the audience' is conditioned by production – along with myriad other social and cultural determinations. The final argument to be made here, signalled at the outset, concerns the ontological priority of production over consumption. Production is processually and temporally prior to consumption; it conditions the television text, and in this way it sets limits to and conditions consumption. Television's relentless output – as with all daily popular media – creates a sediment, a buildup of cultural and discursive traces that have cumulative historical effects in the wider culture. There follow several important clarifications of the status of production *vis à vis* consumption, and of audience research. First, given this processual view of the cumulative effects of television output in the wider culture, not only is it possible to see through the apparent naturalism of the methodological deployment of focus groups, which are presented as though they give a fly-on-the-wall account of the pristine state of the natives, the sovereign active audience; and here, by analogy with focus groups, the critiques of public opinion polling for its illusory plebiscite qualities given by Habermas and Bourdieu are apposite.<sup>35</sup> But it is also possible to see that there is no pristine state of 'televsual wants' that exist entirely outside the ongoing libidinal economy of television. The apparent transparency of the institution's or producers' window on to audience desires via audience research has to be seen in a larger frame in which those very wants are inevitably being conditioned and corralled.

Debates over quality in television are also reconfigured in light of this ontological argument. A feature of these debates in the 1990s was relativism expressed in an inability or unwillingness to adjudicate between audience and producer discourses of quality.<sup>36</sup> But those writers giving equal status to audience and producer concepts of quality ignore the incommensurability of audience experience and production culture. Mundanely, while it is possible for producers to be aware of past audience reactions, it is not possible for audience tastes, or for their representation in audience research, creatively to transform a production culture or to prescribe a creative initiative. It is not possible for audiences to imagine the future in a way that can be practically realized – to make good television. As genre theory has it, the role of production is precisely to imagine novel or unforeseen textual variants, to exceed the horizons of audience expectation. We might even say provocatively that part of the pleasure in consumption is the sensation of temporarily adopting the

35 Jürgen Habermas 'Part VII on the concept of public opinion' in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge Polity, 1996), Pierre Bourdieu 'Public opinion does not exist', in Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelaub (eds), *Communication and Class Struggle* (New York: International General, 1979)

36 See for example, Geoff Mulgan, 'Television's holy grail: seven types of quality', in Mulgan (ed.), *The Question of Quality* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), Cristina Murrone and N. Irvine (eds), *Quality in Broadcasting* (London: IPPR, 1997)



37 Here a discussion of the metaphysics of passivity would be apt starting from the question why has passivity had such a negative charge in social and cultural theory? Writing of the postmodern superego Slavoj Žižek captures the tyranny of the postmodern injunction to be active and to enjoy. The superego inverts the Kantian "You can because you must" turning it into "You must because you can." Subjects experience the need to "have a good time" as a kind of duty. Active consumption becomes a totalitarian imperative. Slavoj Žižek, "You may!", *London Review of Books* 18 March 1999.

38 The reference is to Klein's concept of envious attack on the creativity and creative power of the (m)other: the result of anxieties exacerbated by dependence. For Klein, creativity, thought and the capacity to learn depend on the capacity to tolerate difference and to remain open to the projections of the (m)other. Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude* (New York: Delta, 1975). On Kleinian psychoanalytic theory, see Robert Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (London: Free Association, 1989).

39 This argument is reconfigured by media and cultural forms in which the boundary between states of consumption and production are weakened: video cassettes, PCs, those electronic and digital musics in which consumption initiates new productions and production is distributed across sequential times and spaces. The conceptual uses of a distinction between the two states remains.

40 Onora O'Neill, "Practices of toleration," in Judith Lichtenberg (ed.), *Democracy and the Mass Media* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

41 Concepts of quality and diversity in broadcasting are often linked. But their relationship is complex and they need to be assessed in terms of individual programmes, genres and schedules. Quality programmes may exist in a

'passive' role, that is, an openness to imaginary experience which allows another to *act on one's behalf*, to *provide*; a pleasure in anticipating that the anticipation that expectations will simply be met will be confounded. This is a creative passivity, one that is a necessary constituent of what can properly be termed interactivity.<sup>37</sup>

If we look at the audience issue from these perspectives, we see that there is no necessary stand-off between audience interests and institutional interests, that to see the world this way is to continue buying into a romanticization of consumption and sovereign audiencehood, one that involves an envious attack on the producer phase and its necessary moment of creative power.<sup>38</sup> Production both sets limits to consumption and *makes consumption possible*. It is as though, in some unspoken or unspeakable fantasy, there might exist alternative productions, somehow more perfectly expressive of the tastes and wants of the reified 'audience'. In this fantasy, difference – between producer and consumer states – is obliterated.<sup>39</sup> Implicit in the Television Studies romance of the audience is a psychic polarity in which production has been weighted negatively, associated with domination, ideology, state interests, capitalist accumulation or consumerism, leaving consumption to bear the burden of positivity, as the sole potential moment of redemption. If production is theorized more adequately, including its potential for spaces of agency and redemption, both sides of the polarity are reweighted, it may even be possible to reconsider negative dimensions of consumption!

But the main politics here – obscured by much of Television Studies – concern who gets to make television, how and where, who gets to create and to speak; that is, the politics of communicative entitlement, of the institutional and representational diversity of television.<sup>40</sup> These remain very real issues for democratic conceptions of media, for the BBC as much as for Sky or the US networks. But they also have direct implications for issues of quality, if we include within this rubric innovation and diversity.<sup>41</sup> This is because, as the history of Channel Four suggests, new entrants to production and greater social and cultural diversity in the production population and in the industry may well foster more diverse representations and innovative output.

In a wide-ranging discussion of quality in television, Charlotte Brunsdon has pointed out that the television industry, popular television criticism, audiences and television academics all routinely make judgements of value, yet there has been a reluctance in Television Studies to develop an explicit and reflexive critical account of televisual value. "There is a history, as well as a sociology and politics, of taste and value" which, she argues, needs urgently to be addressed.<sup>42</sup> Frith picks up the lead and, in a similar

certain genre even when there is not much diversity while diversity may characterize a genre or schedule without there being exceptional individual programmes. Diversity may however, be a necessary feature of quality schedules, as it is held to be in the Reithian conception of PSB

42 Charlotte Brunsdon 'Problems with quality', *Screen* vol 31 no 1 (1990) p 90

43 The managing director of a leading entertainment independent told me bemusedly that his stars were devoted to the BBC and considered it the natural home of British comedy – in his view, a sentimental attachment, but one he could understand because of the BBC's continuing rhetorical address to the nation as a whole, where popular can still mean universal

44 I refer to those independents that choose to inhabit the less profitable, less competitively overheated sectors, offering specific expertise. One example in documentaries is the company responsible for the award-winning *The Death of Yugoslavia* (Brook Lapping Associates, tx BBC2, 1995)

45 Brunsdon 'Problems with quality', p 82

spirit, probes how different conceptualizations of value in television circulate in divergent and contradictory discourses and social spaces. Here issues of agency – collective, institutionalized and individual agency – are raised in relation to theorizing value and its conditions. He outlines a distinction between notions of quality, which he associates with the institutions and regulators of PSB, and the economic value of television, associated with entrepreneurial independents. But the distinction between regulators, public service broadcasters and independents needs to be reconsidered. The independents are aligned by Frith primarily with market responsiveness, with international ambitions, with the drive to accumulate economic value. But many independents are oriented towards national or subnational markets and broadcasters, and have as much commitment to public service values as commercial entrepreneurialism.<sup>43</sup> Frith equates the post-Channel Four era of independent production with an increasingly competitive consciousness; and while this may be so, competition is not the main issue for some independents, who plough their own furrow and create singular relationships with commissioners in terms of a productive, but fragile and dependent subsidiarity.<sup>44</sup>

Frith astutely identifies incoherence in the regulator/PSB discourse of quality, and leaves us with the impression that it has little substance and operates primarily as normative ideology. But the quality discourse is at once a practice that has strongly conditioned the nature and history of British terrestrial television, and a form of legitimation in the face of political hostility and aggressive market competitors. Just because it is (also) a form of legitimation does not make it any the less real as a practice. Frith equates the regulator discourse with an earlier quality paradigm based on a consensual, establishment value-transfer from the arts and high culture into television (as in 'classic literary adaptations are quality television', dubbed wittily by Brunsdon 'Brideshead in the Crown').<sup>45</sup> Yet, for all the parody, the high-cultural paradigm yielded rich fruit; it was not without its own inventiveness. Moreover, the quality discourse was oriented towards attaining an optimal balance for mixed schedules as much as individual programmes, and it is this notion of the mix – with its generic hierarchies of value – that was always at the heart of the Reithian concept of PSB. It is the paradigm of the mix that is most under siege not only by the digital debate and the new technologies, but by the rationalization of schedules.

The older quality paradigm as a form of televisual practice existed also in the guise of changing, genre-specific technical and aesthetic codes which informed producer intentionality. Such codes were never limited to high cultural genres. They existed as a practical aesthetic. It follows that it is a mistake to conflate executive pronouncements on quality, aimed at legitimation, with the underbelly of professional practices. The older quality paradigm has now been augmented and

enhanced by a postmodern professional culture that makes explicit and public the values of popular programming, and which has destabilized the former generic hierarchies of value. It espouses genre-specific aesthetics and value judgements for popular genres (comedy, quiz and leisure shows) as much as for the erstwhile quality genres (single drama, documentary, arts), values which are themselves in motion given the rapid proliferation of subgenres and generic syntheses. Frith makes a crucial point in highlighting the way that the shift can be linked with the recruitment into television, since Channel Four, of the post-Media Studies generations. But while this shift is a positive one, in terms of pluralizing and opening up for scrutiny the conceptions of value circulating within the industry, we should nonetheless be sceptical about taking at face value the currently dominant industry account of transition: from the bad old days of broadcaster monopolies and sterile, class-laden cultural hierarchies shored up by PSB and restrictive regulators, to the good present times of lean, competitive independence, unfettered innovation and increasing programme diversity.

Frith notes the importance of a tension between art and commerce in television production. Yet while the tension certainly exists, it is no longer a key contradiction driving practice and informing regulation, as it may have been in an earlier period. Today, the consensus within British television is that commerce, coproduction and entrepreneurialism can produce both good and poor television. The question is the balance and the degree of certain kinds of pressures, how married they are (or not) with other values. The industry knows full well that British entertainment has been well-served by some entrepreneurial independents, which have made a lot of money, but how leisure and popular documentaries have been debased by other independents – which have also made a lot of money. The distinction between cultural value and economic value is clear and not particularly ideological, but their relationship is not simple: some television that makes money is good, a great deal is not. Similarly, people see how co-financing can lead to standardized, mid-Atlantic product; but it can also foster particularistic and national products which, in certain periods, sell abroad. Characteristic of the BBC in the late 1990s was an excessive libidinalization of entrepreneurialism which drove out other values, fostered self-competition and ever-tighter mimesis of rival channels, denigrated in-house production and resources, and accompanied an irrational belief that the independents were *the* source of innovation. The issues are definitively not simple, and to depict them as such overlooks the complexities of judgement faced constantly by professionals and institutions.

Closing his discussion of 'good television', there is a hint of the relativism in arbitrating discourses of value when Frith suggests that stars, promotion and marketing have a greater influence on how

audiences value programmes than, say, good writing or critical acclaim. This may well be the case. But if so, this is a cue to overcome the relativist impasse and note that in professional discourses, while these components of success are considered significant – to variable degrees according to genre (they are central in entertainment and popular drama) – they are not seen as superordinate. Writer, concept, format, production team and budget also remain central to how the potential quality of a piece is judged relative to genre, through a kind of multivariate projection. And compared with star and promotion, this set of criteria is in fact more substantial and material to such an assessment. Nonetheless, given that these indicators are predictive and not certain, in the resulting chemistry of the product such judgements may well be proved wrong.

This is not an argument that every piece of television which is made represents a paragon of quality deriving from an exemplary reflexivity. Rather, I want to suggest that the decisions made by television commissioners and programme-makers are knowing, driven by a calculus that knowingly follows, varies, extends, involutes or deviates from current possibilities to try and achieve certain goals. That is why – in its most elevated manifestations – I emphasized the existence of organic intellectuals in broadcasting, the Yentobs and Jacksons, who – more than any other cultural producers – have to be engaged at once in creative cultural practices (the commissioning and making of programmes, the scheduling of engaging channels) and in second-guessing the likely social, cultural, political and economic ramifications of these practices (in terms of who will be engaged, what the ratings/demographics will be, whether new taste communities will crystallize, how critics and politicians will respond, how the wider public culture will be influenced, how income flows may be affected). Television, perhaps more than any other medium, because of its centralized nature, its high costs, its rapid and continuous output, its massive audiences, its chronic uncertainties, is an art at once cultural, economic and social, in which cultural judgements and decisions, constrained by given resources, continuously imply and imagine sociological outcomes. The uncertainties remain.

The analytical task, then, is to examine 'quality' in its several manifestations in order to see the fit or distance between legitimation – as in policy, regulatory and sanctimonious BBC rhetorics – and production and textual realities. In assessing textual strategies, one way forward is to pursue some ideas explored by John Caughie and me a few years ago:<sup>46</sup> that is, to analyze the different kinds of difference produced by the dynamics of television genres. This is a localization of the key problem in genre theory *per se*, which is how to conceive of the difference between 'mere' nostalgic repetition, the rich mining of the familiar, which may itself be achieved in more

46 John Caughie, 'Adorno's reproach: repetition, difference and television genre', *Screen*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp. 127–53. Georgina Born, 'Against negation for a politics of cultural production', *Screen*, vol. 34, no. 3 (1993), pp. 223–42.

and less inventive ways; the extension and moving-along of any extant genre, that is, a self-conscious exceeding of the previous horizons of expectation, and the production of generic stasis through what might be termed defensive innovation – ‘innovation’ that works purposively to entrench given codes and thus prevents change.<sup>47</sup> All television practice faces these options and, powerfully constrained by given conditions, resolves them in different ways.

Overall, what is striking about the professional and executive culture in British television is that it remains quite unified and consensual,<sup>48</sup> albeit riven by ideological differences stemming from individuals’ closeness to or distance from commercial power-centres. It is because of this unity that the reflexivities I have described are still so developed and widespread. It is this unity which seems to have worked on Elisabeth Murdoch and brought her somewhat into the British fold, perhaps ultimately causing her to leave Sky. It is this unity which probably lies behind Sky’s importation of outsiders into its chief executive positions, as a way of resisting incorporation into British industry doxa. It is a unity that will be subject to great change in future. If my account of television intellectuals has been over-sanguine, it is worth considering finally a case that demonstrates how agency can be used to purposefully cynical and bathetic ends. Nothing exemplifies this better than David Elstein, former chief executive of Channel Five television, a seasoned and clever ex-BBC broadcaster responsible with his director of programmes, Dawn Airey, for the lurch by this latest terrestrial channel into the populist and sensational, in the process cocking a snook at the ITC, the television regulator responsible for charting its PSB obligations. Elstein seemed to see it as the supreme challenge to push to the edge the authority of the ITC, already weakened by the advent of cable and satellite. It would be a mistake to see the drift of Channel Five as resulting purely from commercial pressures; the tone and stance of the Channel, for all these real pressures, does not stem automatically from them. One can see in Elstein’s Channel Five the imprint of the media intellectual whose mission is ‘innovatively’ to be anti-inventive and anti-creative in British television – to undermine the British consensus from the inside.

Television Studies, with notable exceptions, has positioned itself ‘outside’ television. At the start I invoked Callon’s insistence that an adequate sociology must address the way that wider discourses and knowledge systems act performatively to shape the social process, and Beck’s emphasis on the need to take account of discourse coalitions and the politics of discourse in analyzing contemporary social institutions. Following Callon and Beck, going ‘inside’ the institutions of television does not mean adopting the native’s point of view. It does mean analyzing the reflexivity, intentionality and

47 On defensive innovation see Barry and Born. Invention of defensive innovation and inertia

48 A recent UK broadcasting industry event staged by a major Labour think-tank, attended by senior executives from all sectors, showed an astonishing ideological unity on the need for future regulation for diversity. The sole antagonist to the consensus was the Sky representative who spoke a pure neoliberal discourse.

49 The notion of the necessity of a move 'inside' the cultural object – here television – echoes Tony Bennett's argument in *Outside Literature* (London: Routledge 1990), except that my proposal is that a newly conceived aesthetics is part of the 'inside' of the object with which analysis and policy intervention should be concerned. See also Born *Against negation*.

agency of media intellectuals and other industry professionals. It also means following the ways in which such actors themselves think across the distinctions between production, texts and audiences. What implications did the move inside television have for my research on the BBC?<sup>49</sup>

First, it becomes possible to analyze the ways in which the BBC has been crossed by a series of larger political and economic currents, manifest in the managerial drives for processes of auditing, accountability, audience research, marketization, entrepreneurialism and so on, drives which have resulted in an unprecedented centralization and rationalization within the organization. In this sense the study shows how television research can enrich social theory writ large, by illuminating how dominant contemporary political and economic discourses are mediated by the television institutions and industry themselves.

The result of these processes within the BBC was a pronounced centralization and rationalization of the commissioning process, resulting in increasingly imitative and formulaic programming, and of newsgathering and news editorial structures, resulting in less internal diversity in the culture of BBC News. Moreover, the centralization of commissioning in conjunction with other forces has caused an erosion of the well-being and the autonomy of BBC production departments and of the conditions favouring creativity and quality production. Since the BBC's programmes, and the production cultures from which they derive, are the heart of its activities in terms of public service values, audience appreciation and income generation through international sales and multichannel expansion, it is the confidence and well-being of BBC Production that should be the starting point of policy, within and beyond the BBC. Developments in the 1990s inverted that priority.

Second, by moving inside television it becomes possible, as I have mentioned, to develop an understanding of how concepts and judgements of value themselves act within the television industry, at the same time laying the basis for an analysis of televisual aesthetics, and of the complex dynamics of television genres. Despite the forces outlined above, and in counterpoint with them, there survive within the BBC well-developed professional cultures of reflection and debate regarding output, production and scheduling practices. These professional cultures are not always enlightened, but they are often instructively so. Television production and broadcasting are accompanied by rich discourses of professional values which circulate between producers, broadcasters and other professionals and critics, and which are marked both by consensus and by conflict and controversy. Ethnographic study of BBC departments in conjunction with interviews with independents, non-BBC professionals, and the tracking of industry criticism, awards, debates and so on, makes it possible to map the aesthetic, ethical, technical and instrumental

50 Sakae Ishikawa (ed.) *Quality Assessment of Television* (Luton John Libbey, 1996) agrees that professional perspectives are central to assessing quality. However the interview methodology employed by contributors elicits generalized discussions of quality based on recall with no attention to the specificity of genres. It lacks ethnography's capacity to map both the rich discourses around production and how they are put into practice.

51 This contrasts with John Mepham's view that the existence of an ethic of truth-telling on the part of programme makers is one key criterion for judging quality in television. Such an ethic may exist and yet may be compromised when judged against textual results if not accompanied by an element of genuine aesthetic invention. John Mepham 'The ethics of quality in television' in Mulgan (ed.) *The Question of Quality*.

52 My focus here on high-end documentaries from the late 1990s should not necessarily be taken to imply that I judge their quality to be greater than concurrent developments in popular documentary.

values driving production and commissioning in practice, and with reference to specific genres.<sup>50</sup>

While the analysis of quality cannot simply be equated with an understanding of professional values, such an understanding provides a crucial basis on which then to engage in both more informed and more distanced criticism. And in fact, professional values will sometimes provide a sufficient basis on which to discern and judge quality or its absence. I shall briefly cite examples of both cases. In BBC Drama, I observed the ethical and 'truth-telling' values still projected by certain producers into their social-realist dramas of social commentary, some of them single dramas with high artistic status within the department because they are perceived as relatively 'pure' writerly texts. Yet for all their commitment to this aesthetic and form, my assessment of texts from this period of my research leads me to critique social-realist television drama for redundancy and aesthetic exhaustion. My own view is that this aesthetic, while it still produces texts of reasonable quality, shows little capacity for innovation and is not renewable in the ways being attempted by some within BBC Drama.<sup>51</sup>

In relation to certain kinds of documentary, by contrast, the 'emic' view proved convincing to me. On the basis of observations and interviews with documentary producers and filmmakers, observation of industry debates and meetings, and a grasp of the range of recent documentary output, I became convinced by my BBC Documentary informants' advocacy of the innovative filmic qualities of certain films in the BBC2 strand, *Modern Times*. Had I gone native? Did I lack sufficient immersion in documentary to be informed enough to withstand the seductive exegesis of the then strand editor, Stephen Lambert? I believe not. Similarly, I spent time watching the filmmaker Peter Dale edit his film on Albania, *The Return of Zog* (BBC2, 1997), which received some damning reviews. I also acquainted myself with Dale's earlier films. On this basis, despite the reviews, I consider Dale to be innovative, and *Zog* to be a success: a reflexive and experimental film, without announcing itself as such, it mixes deadly serious material with dead-pan humour, current-affairs-style 'witnessing' with a parody of the celebrity chase. Dale did not sell his work to me in these or any other terms. They are my own informed judgements (to be developed elsewhere).<sup>52</sup>

On a different plane, in the analysis of trends in BBC factual programming – news, current affairs, documentaries, light factual and leisure shows – issues of genre loom large. In order to understand any one of these genres in the present, it must be grasped as part of an intergeneric nexus of rival genres, with shifting generic boundaries. As current affairs, a genre in crisis, turns towards the techniques of its currently successful neighbour, documentary (embracing narrative, filmic qualities); and as populist television depends increasingly on rapid intergeneric hybrids between popular

factual genres: quiz shows and cookery shows yielding quiz cookery shows; celebrity talk shows and gardening shows yielding celebrity gardening shows, and so on. The point is that any account of the changing nature of such dominant forms as current affairs or leisure programming must examine such conscious intergeneric influences and shifts, or fail to grasp some crucial – even determinant – dynamics.

Third, there is an increasingly pervasive influence within BBC News (and some independents) of the sociological critique of ‘impartiality’ in news, a halting but tangible cultural shift spearheaded by BBC News’s own organic intellectuals (and influenced also by awareness of the history and character of Channel Four output). One sign of the shift is the move towards individual perspective and personal voice in mainstream reporting. Another is *Newsnight*’s attempt to discern and then stage a representative diversity of views on major issues, rather than simply to ‘hold the middle ground’ in an exchange of predictable establishment voices. Here, in the influence of *Bad News* and *Putting ‘Reality’ Together*,<sup>53</sup> we see the ‘wider public culture’ rebounding within the BBC and, with other factors including sheer fashion, auguring major change.<sup>54</sup>

In sum, rather than assess the truth of audience research, auditing and so on in the abstract, in my BBC study I map the complexity of their effects within the institution – which then enables normative judgement. They have in general been destructive for the primary creative tasks of the BBC. Rather than impose an abstract account of quality on the BBC, my research examines how media intellectuals employ complex forms of judgement in their work, in which aesthetic, ethical, technical-industrial and economic discourses are constantly in play. There are no pure judgements of quality. The discourses of value must be weighed against institutional conditions, production practices, and the resulting schedules and texts. Rather than simply employ sociological critiques of bias to consider whether the BBC measures up to the critiques, I have suggested that the BBC is now measuring itself up to these critiques. The BBC, and parts of the wider journalistic culture, have internalized the sociological critique of impartiality. Sociology, however imperfectly, helps to form the BBC.

Television Studies, which has historically positioned itself outside television, is increasingly entangled in the controversy over what television is to become. Television research, along with other far more powerful public discourses, has become part of the object to be analyzed. One of the most interesting challenges is to move inside television so as to engage critically and productively with the complexity of that situation.

<sup>53</sup> Glasgow University Media Group *Bad News* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976). Philip Schlesinger *Putting ‘Reality’ Together* (London: Constable, 1978).

<sup>54</sup> There are also signs that the ITC, the main PSB regulator for Britain’s commercial channels, is metabolizing the critique of impartiality in news. The idea of amending the impartiality requirements is tentatively being floated for some new channels, in order to allow more variety in mode of address and greater diversity of opinion.



report:

## Young people, new media: the Himmelweit II project

DAVID OSWELL

The wide-scale introduction of television into the home in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s was co-extensive with an equally wide-scale reorganization of the relations between public and domestic times and spaces, the relations between children and adults and the relations of expertise and governance. The meaning of 'television' was caught up within a wider configuration of discourses and institutional change. This change has been well-documented with regard to the US and the UK and new historical research is beginning to document such change in other national contexts.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas radio centred its address on a site of collective family listening (whether in the formal setting of the parlour or the multi-purpose informality of the living room/kitchen), television grew up in a leisure-oriented, family-centred sitting-room culture, a space which was increasingly opened up to the rest of the home. In the 1960s the home was redesigned as a multi-functional series of spaces and times. Television broadcasters were slow to pick up on this, but architects and designers were imagining and building homes for families which were no longer centred on collective family activities. These new experts designed homes for segmented domestic living.<sup>2</sup> The primary theoretical matrix for these designers was not the 'room' (as a cellular enclosed and unitary entity), but household activities delineated through space and time. Rooms were there to be

- 1 See Lynn Spigel *Make Room for TV* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press 1992). Tim O'Sullivan, 'Television memories and cultures of viewing' in John Corner (ed.) *Popular Television in Britain* (London: BFI 1991). David Oswell *Television Childhood Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press forthcoming). Liesbet Van Zoonen and Jan Wieten 'It wasn't exactly a miracle: the arrival of television in Dutch family life' *Media Culture and Society* vol. 16 no. 4 (1994).
- 2 See Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (London: HMSO 1961).

used and occupied. They were conceptualized as multifunctional spaces according to different domestic activities (with competing needs for community and privacy), at different times of the day and at different stages in the life-span and development of the family. Sitting rooms were designed as open-plan spaces in which children could do their homework, while Mum did the sewing and Dad watched television. Equally, children's bedrooms were recognized as spaces for young people's leisure activities and entertainment and as places in which older children could get away from the rest of the family. In the 1950s and 1960s, we also see an emergence of popular representations of teenagers in their bedrooms listening to records and the development of a teenage popular culture. The differentiation of space and time in the home was connected to a differentiation of popular culture. Information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as television and the record player, provided one of the means through which this connection was managed.

The increasing privatization of leisure and entertainment did not lead to the isolation of the home from the outside world, but rather a complex series of articulations between different forms of domestic space/times and public cultures began to become apparent. In recent research, *Young People/New Media* by Sonia Livingstone and Moira Bovill, these long-term shifts in the relations between young people, screen technologies and private/public spaces and times are substantiated through extensive qualitative and quantitative data.<sup>3</sup> Livingstone and Bovill show how the social relations of young people's ICT use is shifting from the living room to the bedroom and from the family to friendship networks. These researchers have correspondingly moved away from earlier sitting-room-centred ethnographic study. In doing so, they contribute to our understanding of the complex negotiations of ICTs within the home. However, what is significant here is not so much the emergence of 'new bedroom cultures' which have been in place ever since the 1950s, but the displacement of young people's consumption of specifically *screen entertainment* from the sitting room to the bedroom and the way in which young people's bedroom cultures are constructed through a wider range of ICTs. 63% of young people now have a television in their bedroom, 21% a video, 34% a TV-linked games machine, 59% a radio, 61% a hi-fi, 68% a personal stereo, 64% books, and 12% a PC. Moreover, the research shows interestingly that working-class children and boys are more likely to have screen media in their bedrooms. In addition to class and gender, parental education is also a factor here. Middle-class and more highly educated parents, the authors state, are more likely to disapprove of their children having a television in their bedroom and more likely instead to provide their children with books.

The report comes out of a bigger European-wide project on

3 Sonia Livingstone 'Children's bedroom culture', paper presented to the Second World Summit on Television for Children, London, March 1998, Sonia Livingstone and Moira Bovill *Young People/New Media* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1999). The report is available from Carol Whitwill, 5465 LSE Houghton St, London WC2A 2AE 0207 955 6490 c.whitwill@lse.ac.uk

children, young people and screen media. Research was conducted in Denmark, Germany, Finland, Flanders, France, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, but directed from the Department of Social Psychology at the London School of Economics (LSE), and bears the hallmarks of the tradition of media research at the LSE. In 1958, forty-one years earlier, Hilde Himmelweit and her research team at the LSE had published *Television and the Child: an Empirical Study into the Effects of Television on the Young*.<sup>4</sup> This was the first major research, anywhere in the world, on children and television and it was soon replicated by a similar study in the USA by Wilbur Schramm and his colleagues in the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup> Himmelweit's research was a major survey of the impact of a 'new' ICT in the lives of children and young people. The research was initiated by the BBC, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, and was sufficiently influential as to have a significant impact on television governance and policy with regard to children. 'Himmelweit II', as it has been colloquially named, pursues a similar agenda and is addressed to a similar constituency of corporate and governmental policymakers. Its advisory committee, for example, includes representatives from the Broadcasting Standards Commission, the Independent Television Commission, the BBC, the Independent Television Association, ITV Network Limited, Yorkshire Tyne Tees, British Telecom and the Advertising Association. The initial cost of purchasing the report and its executive summary make it absolutely clear the range of intended and possible readers. This is not a criticism of the report, but it is important in that it shapes possible readings of it and any academic attempt to contextualize it within the wider field of media and communications research.<sup>6</sup>

Research of this kind and quality is rare. The costs and administration clearly weigh upon the report's style of address and its engagement with existing academic research. Nevertheless, Himmelweit II presents a clear agenda concerning the uses and meanings of screen media for a constituency of corporate and governmental policymakers. Livingstone and Bovill frame their findings in terms of 'mix' (range of ICTs available), 'match' (the relation between ICTs and the constituency of user) and 'meanings' (the interpretations and styles of use). They provide data on the distribution of media access, use and meanings in terms of the demographic variables of gender, age and social class, but they also typify different 'styles of media use' in terms of 'screen entertainment fans' (those who spend more time watching television, playing video and computer games, and less on reading books), 'specialists' (such as 'book lovers', 'PC fans' and 'music lovers'), 'traditionalists' (those who spend more time on television, music and print media and less on PCs and computer games) and 'low media users' (those who spend little time on any media).

<sup>4</sup> Hilde Himmelweit et al. *Television and the Child: an Empirical Study into the Effects of Television on the Young* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).

<sup>5</sup> Wilbur Schramm et al. *Television in the Lives of Our Children* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> These comments are directed to the report and not to forthcoming publications emerging from the research. The report is now priced at £25 to academics, schools, colleges and charities.

Although Livingstone and Bovill draw upon a research agenda that concerns the social study of audiences which was developed within media and communication studies in the early 1980s, they fail (not surprisingly given the parameters of their research design) to take up some of the more innovative research on reflexivity, knowledge and power (for example, Walkerdine) and on children's media culture (such as Kinder, Buckingham, and so on). In this sense, their quantitative and qualitative surveying and mapping of young people's media use and meanings across the population is very different from work emerging from other recent research programmes (such as the ESRC *Virtual Society?* programme directed by Steve Woolgar), work which adopts a more reflexive and ethnographic approach. For example, Sally Wyatt's research (within this ESRC programme) on young people's take up of virtual technologies has suggested that young people, far from enthusiastically embracing the Internet, have begun to turn away from it.<sup>7</sup> Such research findings present a stark contrast to the much-hyped government agenda to link up all school children in the UK to the Internet, to overcome the 'digital divide' between information-haves and have-nots, and the broader political economic imperative to wire-up the UK economy for greater international competitiveness. The questions of 'do young people really want this?' and 'whose policy agenda is this?' become clearly visible within such studies.

However, given the different emphasis and methodological stance of the LSE work, Livingstone and Bovill present an important signal to policymakers that children's and young people's relation to screen media cannot be conceptualized in terms of simplistic notions of 'effects' or 'addiction'. For example, the authors are at pains to stress that children and young people who spend a significant amount of their time with just one medium cannot be typified as 'addicts'. In doing so, Himmelweit II marks a departure from the policy agenda established by Himmelweit I, in which references to addiction were picked up and pursued by broadcasters, regulators and the press. Livingstone and Bovill are keen to stress that the amount of time children and young people spend at home with their ICTs is a consequence of 'a lack of things to do in the area where they live, their parents' fears for their safety outside the home and the easy attractions of an increasingly personalized media environment inside the home'.<sup>8</sup> Much of the press coverage of this latter report has been sensitive to its findings and to the attempt to construct a more positive problematic concerning young people and ICT use.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, some press coverage in the UK has added a more conventional spin. For example, *The Express*, a middlebrow national newspaper, in an editorial entitled 'Electronic thrills rob children of a real life', states that.

Far more worrying is the survey's finding that parents are

7 Sally Wyatt. They came, they surfed, they went back to the beach: paper presented to Virtual Society? Conference, Ashridge House 2000.

8 Livingstone and Bovill. *Young People, New Media*, p. 5.

9 *The Independent* for example argued that the Labour cabinet should read the report and spend time discussing its policy implications. *The Independent* 19 March 1999.

colluding in the transformation of their children's bedrooms into multimedia centres because they see the use of computers, television and stereos as a safe alternative to the streets. This must isolate children from their parents as well as the wider environment which teenagers say they find 'boring'.<sup>10</sup>

This newspaper commentary has resonances with some of the press coverage of the original Himmelweit research in the late 1950s which interpreted the earlier data in terms of fears about the lack of parental supervision of working-class children and hence the need to properly regulate television content. In a similar vein, *The Express* presents an image of the child's bedroom as a prison cell elsewhere in the same edition. Sitting above the copy, 'Climate of fear keeps children prisoners in their own bedrooms', is a chiaroscuro-lit representation of three boys in a bedroom. The room is sparsely furnished with little more than a computer, television, video game machine and mobile phone. On the television screen are the words 'Game Over'. On top of the television set, three videos are perched. One of them bears the title, 'Slashers'. This is an image, the article tells us, of 'The Inmates of Bedroom Wing'. In contrast to the nuanced and layered analysis of young people's differentiated use and understanding of screen media as presented by Livingstone and Bovill, *The Express* attempts to reconstrue the 'new bedroom cultures' within an older more insidious set of discourses which pathologize children's and young people's domestic ICT consumption. The pathologized image of the 'television addict' constructed in the 1950s – the solitary child sitting in the darkened sitting room watching family television – is invoked (albeit in a contemporary guise). Despite the different contours of parental regulation found in Himmelweit II and despite the seeming lack of parental concern about children watching television and playing computer games unsupervised in their bedrooms that the research evidences, some of the press continue to construct the issues within a more familiar set of fears and concerns. Thus some of the press reporting of Himmelweit II understands the 'newness' of new media through existing discourses and interpretative repertoires.

This raises more general questions concerning our understanding of new media. Too often new media are interpreted through the terms, categories and narratives that have been deployed in relation to existing media. The danger of such an approach (which is also adopted in some academic research) is that we simply construct 'new media' within existing intellectual (analytical and methodological) parameters. But equally, the 'newness' of new media cannot be understood in empirical terms. It is not simply that 'new media' now includes digital television, e-media, computer games and so on, whereas in the 1980s 'new media' included satellite and cable

television. It is not just a matter of new empirical objects being added to the list and others removed. 'Newness' and 'oldness' might be materially inscribed in objects, but they are not intrinsic qualities of the objects *per se*. The 'new' of new media suggests something more, something altogether more philosophical, but also researchable in empirical terms. The prefix 'new' provides the opportunity for *thinking differently*. It allows us to think differently about our relation to objects and agents and also to rethink our understanding of objectivity and agency. In this respect, for example, a more reflexive approach might provide the possibility for more interactive ways of involving young people as agents within the research process

## reviews

### review:

**Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (eds), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*. London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, 301 pp.**

#### C. PAUL SELLORS

Daily, countless people enter cinemas, sit in the dark and laugh, cry, scream or bite their nails in response to events depicted on screen; and this has been going on for a century. Yet despite the ubiquity of this behaviour, film theory possesses few detailed explanations of the nature of our emotional engagement with films. With *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion*, Carl Plantinga and Greg Smith address this absence from within current developments in cognitive research. Conventional wisdom has held that emotions interfere with thought, and that they therefore need to be bracketed to enable clear understandings of rational mental processes. Increasingly, however, cognitivists accept that emotions and cognition should not be isolated.<sup>1</sup> Both involve normal, structured brain and mental processes that constantly interact. The dozen essays in this volume all subscribe to this hypothesis. Although identifiably a contribution to cognitive film studies, this book is also largely a work of analytical film theory. Cognitive theory's interest in analytical philosophy has tended to engender precise conceptualization and analysis in argumentation.<sup>2</sup> In this tradition, many works in this volume consider precisely focused questions with explicit detail and clarity. Indeed, it is a strength of this book that so many of its contributions belong in both camps.

Plantinga and Smith intend that *Passionate Views* demonstrates the utility of this new approach. Not surprisingly, therefore, many of its

<sup>1</sup> David Bordwell recognized this movement in cognitive psychology over a decade ago. See 'A case for cognitivism', *Iris*, no. 9 (Spring 1988) pp. 11–40.

<sup>2</sup> See Richard Allen's and Murray Smith's introduction to *Film Theory and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 3.

constituents develop work begun elsewhere. In 'Film, emotion and genre', for instance, Noel Carroll applies his thought theory of emotional response to genre. Most of the arguments in the book's final section proceed with one eye on Murray Smith's concept of character engagement and the other on Carroll's rejection of identification.<sup>3</sup> Gregory Currie's essay 'Narrative desire' expands previous work on emotion and narration from *Image and Mind*. The volume itself can even be seen as an attempt to develop the type of alternative framework to the ideological stoicism and formalism characteristic of contemporary film theory that Plantinga identified in 'Notes on spectator emotion and ideological film criticism' in *Film Theory and Philosophy*.<sup>4</sup>

The editors divide their anthology into three sections comprising four essays each, addressing emotion and genre, emotion and film style, and desire and identification. Of these three sections, the last considers the most theoretically fundamental questions of the book, and does so with a consistently high level of rigour and scholarship. I will begin my discussion of *Passionate Views* there.

The contributors to this section scrutinize such concepts as empathy, desire, identification and character engagement, rescuing them from overly general and metaphorical treatments in contemporary film theory. Each indicates how such concepts are localized phenomena in spectation that develop through interactions with film narratives. In 'Identification and emotion in narrative film', for instance, Berys Gaut agrees with Carroll that the type of ontological identification proposed by psychoanalytic theories is logically inconsistent, but disagrees that this conclusion necessarily discredits identification altogether. He proceeds to defend identification as both imaginative and necessarily partial. Spectators imaginarily identify with characters' perceptions, motivations, affects or epistemology, for instance. He then outlines a commonsense notion of spectator empathy, suggesting it is likewise partial and intentional. Spectators need not experience the emotions characters actually possess, but only adopt the feelings they attribute to characters based on their specific identification. Plantinga traverses similar ground, illuminating the importance the human face has for character identification and empathy. Like Gaut, he contends that spectators' empathetic emotions are not identical with character emotions, only congruent. Both Gaut and Plantinga risk casting empathy so widely that sympathy and empathy become difficult to distinguish. Each recognizes this difficulty and accepts that more needs to be said on the topic. Murray Smith's 'Gangsters, cannibals, aesthetics or apparently perverse allegiances' is equally impressive. Here he further elaborates how films can structure character engagement, allowing even for allegiance with those understood to be morally reprehensible.

Unfortunately, this level of rigour and clarity is not uniform

3 See respectively, Murray Smith *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) and Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (London: Routledge, 1990).

4 Antecedents to many of these arguments can be found in Allen and Smith (eds) *Film Theory and Philosophy*; David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (eds) *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996); Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*; and Gregory Currie, *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy and Cognitive Science*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).



throughout the book. In section one, Ed Tan and Nico Frijda hang their distinction between F emotions and A emotions (responses to fictional events and film as film respectively) on the rather abrupt assertion that 'viewers are led to imagine themselves as invisible witnesses that are physically present in the fictional world' (p. 52). In section three and elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> Currie offers solid arguments against precisely such a proposal. Yet Tan and Frijda offer no argument to defend this position. If spectators inhabit fictions as these authors claim, then it is not clear how they could attend to a film's formal qualities to develop A emotions. Such awareness would tend to interrupt imaginary occupation. Things worsen when they define F emotions as empathetic emotions, which include sympathy, compassion and admiration (p. 52). Positing sympathy as a category of empathy contradicts common sense and usage. Finally, to conclude unquestioningly that Freud's 'oceanic feelings' can in some way explain sentiment reintroduces the type of speculative tradition that this volume is at such pains to combat. In contrast, Cynthia Freeland shows in her unique analysis of the sublime in cinema the significance that clearly defined and defended categories like F and A emotions can possess. In her chapter she characterizes sublime moments in cinema as emotional and cognitive tensions that develop through a shift from painful F emotions to unusually strong and pleasurable A emotions.

Dirk Eitzen's generally well-argued thesis on humour and emotions suffers slightly from a lapse in conceptual rigour. He suggests that 'if one defines emotions (as many do) as more-or-less automatic responses that when triggered *incline us to think and act in a particular way*, then humour very definitely is an emotion' (p. 85). Common acceptance is hardly a criterion for rigorous theorizing, although to be fair it often directs theorists in useful directions. Unfortunately, Eitzen either confuses or conflates cause with effect. If asked how I feel after receiving news about the death of my dog, for instance, I say 'I am sad'. If instead I hear an extremely funny joke, I cannot respond 'I am humour'. The awkwardness of this answer is not due to a quirk of the English language. Humour is the cause of the jocular emotion that I feel, not the emotion itself, just as the threat the green slime poses to fictional characters causes my fear, but does not constitute my emotion. This is not a fatal flaw in Eitzen's thesis. However, it does seem to limit his appreciation of how formal properties and humorous content in film interact and the varying responses that they can engender.

The book's second section possesses some similar lapses. Torben Grodal, for instance, asserts without argument or hesitation that 'empathy and identification are central for human bonding and caring and probably rely on innate dispositions'. In light of arguments offered in section three of this book, this is hardly unproblematic. At other times his argument is simply opaque. He insists, for instance,

that 'characters are sources of energy fields that the spectator experiences as living beings due to innate psychic mechanisms', without any explanation of what energy fields are meant to be. Further, he contends that experiments concluding that humans anthropomorphize motion in geometric shapes imply that we 'understand phenomena by subsuming them under the schema of animate beings' (p. 131). How the latter follows from the former is not clear. Grodal seems to believe that science speaks for itself. Most authors in this volume rightly reject this presumption.

I must confess that the relevance to the volume of Susan Feagin's article 'Time and timing' eludes me somewhat. Considering the very brief remarks the editors have for it in their introduction, I wonder if it to some extent also escapes them. In spite of occasional lapses into colloquial prose and speculative hypotheses about such things as what makes certain movies popular, her argument suggests that timing in film affects both spectators' cognition and emotions, given that these coexist. Subsequently, emotions in this paper seem peripheral to an otherwise interesting thesis about the way that timing affects understandings of both narration and the fictional contents of film.

Jeff Smith's cognitive approach to film music presents a detailed and productive treatment of complex subject matter that underscores effective filmic analysis. In contradistinction to psychoanalytical theories of film music, Smith identifies succinctly the intricate manner in which film directs attention and understanding by harnessing our emotions to assist not only in navigating the fiction, but also forming and re-integrating opinions and judgements. His paper clearly indicates how images and music interact for narrative comprehension, while also explaining how music functions for such purposes as linking temporally disparate narrative components and conveying character traits and motivations.

Like Jeff Smith, Greg Smith also examines quite effectively some of the seemingly peripheral elements of style in film. He recognizes that scenes evoking strong emotions constitute only a small fraction of screen time, and that much of the remainder is employed to convey moods. These elements of style, which he calls redundant cues, generate moods that prepare spectators for short bursts of intense emotions. These bursts then remotivate and help sustain moods. Smith suggests that moments of narrative significance cannot always be relied upon to provide the necessary emotive bursts to sustain mood, and that subsequently films often possess bursts with little or no direct narrative significance (p. 117). He aims to offer a bottom-up analysis, one that moves outward from data to theoretical categories. Yet when he examines the opening sequence of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981), the opposite seems true. He conceives 'narrative significance' too tightly as a goal-oriented description, bracketing valuable information that may, for instance,

justify or explain explicit narrative objectives. He suggests that the 'main purpose of the stone idol [sequence] is to shout "Boo!" to the audience, marking this moment as fearsome . . . the stone idol scare primarily bolsters the mood's predisposition toward emotion, a necessary function given the structure of the emotional system'. (pp 119–20). Strictly speaking Smith is correct; the sequence does provide 'emotional orientation' without getting Jones any closer to the ark. But to relegate this sequence to a thrill tactic squeezes out its function in conveying Jones's intelligence, cunning, single-mindedness, his talent as an archaeologist and appropriateness for the job of retrieving the ark, not to mention the ruthlessness and resourcefulness of his nemesis. Such information aids spectators in understanding narrative developments and establishing character allegiances. Smith finds little outside the emotional thrill of the sequence because he has theorized that nothing else needs to be there.

*Passionate Views* is a valuable contribution to what could be termed cognitive film theory's second phase. By accepting that emotions and thought productively coexist, the contributors to this book offer detailed pictures of how spectators understand narration and meaning and emotionally entertain nonexistent characters and events. They also demonstrate the value of analytical rigour and conceptual clarity in argumentation. Plantinga and Smith offer this collection as an early contribution to a young debate. *Passionate Views* indicates this debate already possesses maturity and sophistication.

## **review:**

**Sarah Street, *British National Cinema*. London: Routledge, 1997, 232 pp.**

**John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s: Issues And Themes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, 261 pp.**

**Robert Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema of the 90s*. London: British Film Institute, 2000, 196 pp.**

## **IAN CONRICH**

Now may be a good time to assess British cinema studies. The profusion of books that have been published on the subject since 1997 would suggest the academic equivalent of a gold rush. As a reviews editor for the *Journal of Popular British Cinema* I have despatched in excess of 110 books for review over the last three years. Several of these reviewers have turned to François Truffaut's immortal remark that 'Britain' and 'cinema' are incompatible terms;<sup>1</sup> the apparent commercial viability of publishing books on this subject would suggest otherwise.

Can there really be that many researchers of British cinema? Moreover, can the market sustain interest in such a vast number of new titles? A June 1998 British cinema conference at the University of East Anglia demonstrated the subject's remarkable health, yet it also exposed the growing tensions and fractures. The study of British cinema is far from being homogenous and this is a sign of its growing maturity. A significant aspect of the interest in this national cinema is how it has appealed to both a diversity of academic approaches and, simultaneously, fans, aficionados and local historians who have contributed popular publications concerned with film genres, stars, recollections and experiences of cinema-going.

<sup>1</sup> François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (London: Paladin 1978) p. 140

Christine Geraghty regards the study of British cinema as yet to attain adulthood – it has developed ‘spats, arguments and quarrels perhaps appropriate to the subject’s teenage years’<sup>2</sup> She also observes ‘an unhelpful possessiveness and anxiety around how we feel about an area being opened up for study’<sup>3</sup> Initial work on British cinema was conducted by a small number of researchers and it is the work of two that indicated where new studies could find their principal challenges. Alan Lovell wrote in 1969 that British cinema was ‘unknown’.<sup>4</sup> whilst Julian Petley argued in 1986 that academia had failed to locate what he termed a ‘lost continent’ of British films.<sup>5</sup>

The three books reviewed here approach these challenges differently. Sarah Street’s book traces the development of British cinema during film’s first century; John Hill’s study focuses on the 1980s, a decade regarded as the Thatcher years, and employs a cultural-political examination of film, Robert Murphy’s edited anthology is a consideration of a decade even more recent and it claims on the book’s back cover to be ‘the only up-to-date overview of British cinema in the 90s’.

*British Cinema of the 90s* could be read as a companion to *The British Cinema Book*,<sup>6</sup> which Murphy edited in 1997 and which, with a few exceptions, omitted discussion of British film post 1979. Unfortunately, *British Cinema of the 90s* shares the weaknesses of its predecessor – a structure that restricts individual contributions and a content that is less diverse than disparate. This is the shortest of the three books reviewed, nevertheless it manages to squeeze eighteen contributions into its 187 pages, adding a compressed index that would strain the best eyesight. Contributors consider cinema multiplexes, Hollywood-UK relationships, nostalgia and youth, masculinity, the working class, and black British films. Initially, the range of subjects feels extensive, but absent areas of focused analysis include the internet (a phenomenon of the 1990s and the site of neo-fan culture and neo-film promotional activities), home entertainment technology and video/DVD rental and retail, and the explosion of home moviemaking and the growth of a camcorder culture. With its compendious coverage and *Transpotting*’s Renton (Ewan McGregor) on the front cover this anthology feels too student-friendly, it will undoubtedly appeal to the many undergraduates who view cinema history as enclosed within their generation.

As could be predicted, *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Brassed Off* (1996), and *The Full Monty* (1997) receive much attention, less expected are the illustrations from the foreign films *Il Postino* (1994), *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997), and *Festen* (1998). The prioritizing of these foreign film images is somewhat ironic in a book which devotes an article, by Geoffrey Macnab, to ‘Unseen British Cinema’. Macnab begins his contribution with a 1998 quote from *Screen Finance* that ‘nearly 60 per cent of

2 Christine Geraghty ‘Reviews’  
*Journal of Popular British Cinema* no 2 (1999) p 140

3 Ibid p 141

4 Alan Lovell, ‘British cinema: the unknown cinema’, BFI Education Seminar Paper (1969). Also, ‘The unknown cinema of Britain’ in *Cinema Journal* vol 11, no 2 (1972) pp 1–8

5 Julian Petley ‘The lost continent’ in Charles Barr (ed.) *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute 1986) pp 98–119

6 Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute 1997)

the films involving a UK producer that went into production in 1996, have yet to be screened at a UK cinema' (p. 135), but this is then followed by four frustratingly short and descriptive case studies. Murphy's lead article takes a similar stance to Macnab. It refers to Lovell's 'unknown cinema' and says that 'British cinema of the 90s deserves the epithet simply because a substantial portion of the films made have never been released and many of those that have, reached only a tiny audience' (p. 4). It would be impractical for *British Cinema of the 90s* to attempt to include a mention of every relevant film, but just focusing on the first half of the decade no trace can be found in the book of theatrically released productions such as *The Krays* (1990), *Let Him Have It* (1991), *The Pope Must Die* (1991), *Dirty Weekend* (1992), *Peter's Friends* (1992), *Wittgenstein* (1993), and *Tom and Viv* (1994). Films which are known, but in this book lost

*British Cinema in the 1980s* is John Hill's first book specifically on British cinema for thirteen years – since the much referenced *Sex, Class and Realism* – in which he explores questions of nation, identity and 'Britishness' through an examination of society, politics and the film industry.<sup>7</sup> British cinema of the 1980s is addressed by Hill through three approaches: the contexts of film industry concentrating on the economies of production, the influential developing relationship of film and television, government policies and the Thatcherite 'project', film representations of the past and the images of Empire, heritage and remembrance (of the 1950s); film representations of the present concentrating on cultural issues of class, gender and ethnicity and the nature of the 'state of the nation' film.

Chapter four of this book – 'The Heritage Film: Issues and Debates' – is a valuable discussion of one of the main subjects of contention of 1980s British cinema. Hill neatly assesses what has been written and is able to construct the most cogent and balanced argument to date. The heritage film may appear subversive and critical of British conservatism, but the ideological challenge and the raising of issues of gender and sexual identity which can be read within the films is 'often timid and restrained' (p. 98). The films are, as Hill argues, ambivalent, for they 'circulated within a culture in which much more open and questioning representations of gender and sexuality . . . were possible' (p. 98).

Much of 1980s British cinema is concluded to have been anti-Thatcherite and, as Hill writes, this is ironic as these types of films emerged 'in large measure, as a result of the implementation of Thatcherite policies' (p. xi). Thatcherism's social neo-conservatism and its strong moral stance can be viewed as a response to 'the perceived breakdown in social authority and standards which the 'permissiveness' of the 1960s had set in motion' (p. 8). Chapter six of Hill's book – 'Remembering the 1950s: Dance with a Stranger' – argues that although 1980s British cinema was most drawn to a past located at the start of the twentieth century it also showed much

7 John Hill, *Sex Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956–1963* (London: British Film Institute, 1986).

interest in the 1950s. Hill employs Thatcher's criticisms of the 1960s to construct a theory that there is a memorising of the 1950s in British cinema not so much as 'a period of calm before the upheavals of the 1960s [but] as the harbinger of things to come' (p. 125). This chapter is unmistakably the book's shortest and it seems to function less as a discussion of a return to a previous decade than as an opportunity to expose remnant ideas on one film – *Dance with a Stranger* (1985). It should not be forgotten that British cinema around the 1980s also remembered the 1960s with an interesting number of films that included *Scandal* (1988), which recreated the period 1959–1963, *Buster* (1988), set in the period 1963–1966, and *The Krays* (1990). These films which could have skewered Hill's conclusions are swiftly and unconvincingly avoided.

Such films would appear to be too populist for Hill's taste and this is a symptom of the whole book. His case studies rely on a pantheon of British cinema and the established contemporary 'classics' – *Chariots of Fire* (1981), *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1983), *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985), *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989), and *Riff-Raff* (1991). Dominating Hill's discussion is an opinion that 1980s British cinema is characterized most by art film production. In an article which I wrote on British cinema in the 1990s I argued that the films of that period could be distinguished by their commercial objectives and could be read as 'a collision between art (or meaning) and mainstream or popular entertainment'.<sup>8</sup> Such a collision originates in the 1980s where the weakened mainstream cinema of the 1970s met the emerging new art film. Yet Hill prefers just one side of British cinema and those productions which he ignores, probably because of their populist nature, include examples of the gangster film (*The Long Good Friday* [1981]), comedy (*Monty Python's Meaning of Life* [1983]), horror (*The Doctor and the Devils* [1985]) and science-fiction (*Brazil* [1985]). The introduction to *British Cinema in the 1980s* says that it is not 'an exhaustive account of films' (p. xi). This is true and as an example of writing that manages to prolong the existence of a 'lost continent' of British cinema there is considerable room for other books on this decade.

The books by Murphy and Hill are good examples of how recent research on British Cinema has either been from an anthology approach or that of a single author concentrating on a specific period or theme. Street's *British National Cinema* is the first book in nearly twenty years to have the fearlessness to tackle the history of the entire British cinema in one book, Roy Armes's *A Critical History of British Cinema*, was the last.<sup>9</sup> As an introductory discussion Street's book is unrivalled, and it should be a core text for any British cinema course. Street is able to cover an admirable breadth of material on British studios, genres, directors, stars and finance, although this does, inevitably, lead to a summarization of certain issues.

8 Ian Conrich 'Art or entertainment: British cinema in the nineties', *Anglofiles* (Denmark) no. 96 (March 1996), p. 5.

9 Roy Armes *A Critical History of the British Cinema* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1978).

Almost half of the book is a chronological tracing of patterns and developments of British cinema, within a social, cultural and political context. At a mid-book point, Street considers 'Genres in transition, 1970s-90s' and films are sectioned under headings such as 'Horror, science-fiction and comedy', 'History as spectacle' and 'Hybrid films'. Despite the shortness of this chapter, its contraction of titles into restrictive categories, and the curious omission of some key films (no mention of *Absolute Beginners* [1986] in the section 'The music industry and musicals'), Street exhibits an awareness of the multifariousness of British cinema that sometimes feels absent from the books by Murphy and Hill.

With more space Street can definitely construct a formidable analysis of particular questions of British cinema. This is evidenced in the second half of the book where a consideration of 'Acting and Stars', and a case study of Anna Neagle, exposes one of the more notable areas of an unknown British cinema. As Street writes '[i]t is commonly assumed that the star system functioned most fully in Hollywood and British stars have not received the degree of attention granted to their Hollywood counterparts' (p. 119).

The dominance of Hollywood at the British box office has led to an argument that British cinema is American. Conversely, British cinema is not simply a domestic market, but local productions also enjoy a foreign reception. These are just some of the neglected studies of British cinema. The concept of 'Britishness' and a seemingly uncomplicated governing idea of a filmmaking nation has begun to be replaced with the notion of the city as the site of cultural production and identity and, particularly, within recent British cinema there have emerged issues of multiculturalism and regionalism. Moya Luckett's article 'Image and Nation in 1990s British Cinema', in Murphy's anthology, raises a series of fascinating questions, but this is only a start. Further studies should also significantly connect cinema in Britain to today's multi-media and new communication technologies, film is not simply celluloid and feature-length, it can be digitalized and produced in short form, and cinema is not culturally isolated – a film such as *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998) demonstrates a diversity of cultural associations including football (the player turned actor, Vinnie Jones), music (the popular soundtrack), television (the spin-off television series), fashion (the increase in sales of 'gangster' style leather jackets), and the print media and its representation of masculinity (the manner in which the film has both responded to and influenced the emergence of a 'lad' culture). More is now known about British cinema, and a 'lost continent' has been discovered, but large areas uncharted. If the study of British cinema, with its intensity for publication, is not to become pleonastic, then it will need to be adventurous.



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